



# **BOMBASTIC**

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## **NAVIGATING THE LGBTI REFUGEE AND ASYLUM CRISIS**

**Our Voices, Our Stories, Our Lives**

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# FOREWORD



Kasha  
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To our esteemed readers,

Mbalamusizza nnyo mwenna mu biti byammwe. I greet each one of you in your different capacities and protocols.

With great honor, I present to you the fifth edition of Bombastic Magazine in which we share the realities of LGBT+ refugees and asylum seekers living in and out of Uganda. This publication has come at a timely moment when issues of asylum are at the peak as matters of contention both at regional and international levels.

Over the years, we have witnessed a bothersome wave of threats, hate speech, violence and intolerance directed towards gender and sexual minorities in the country. While some of our community members have been attacked and even killed under uncertain circumstances, there has been an influx of LGBT+ refugees and asylum seekers who have opted to flee to neighboring countries, Europe and American states for refuge.

However, it is disheartening that what are meant to be safe havens for their escape turn into places of torture and harassment due to intensified stigma and violence which have been manifested in form of arbitrary arrests and prolonged detentions, restrictive or no movements due to zero documentation plus widespread discrimination in access to healthcare, employment and welfare.

The recent flood of reports about attacks on LGBT+ refugees and asylum seekers in Kakuma camp are a testimony to the existence of these injustices allegedly perpetrated by fellow homophobic or transphobic refugees living in the settlement camps, local residents who claim that refugees have no rights in their country and Kenyan police who act under the directive of some officials within organizations

meant to protect ALL REFUGEES.

Contributors to the above have been credited to the ruling upheld by Kenyan High Court last year in May on the criminalization of same sex conduct which brought a hefty backlash against the LGBT community in Kenya and the East African region toppled with the Trump administration which seeks to dismantle the US asylum system.

The aloofness of international human rights bodies in face of persecution and double standards by LGBT+ asylum host countries have not helped the situation as they are directly or indirectly in favor of the prolonged resettlement process. This has left several helpless, scared and frightened for their lives.

It is my hope that calls for intervention will be heeded. United Nations, regional and national human rights institutes in charge should actively involved in ensuring the protection of ALL refugees. Governments should strictly implement the international recommendations in place which will be helpful in tackling such forms of violence, discrimination, torture and ill treatment while also safeguarding inherent human rights and freedoms that we are all due.

To all those who were bold to tell their stories and experiences, we appreciate you for speaking your truth to stir up an impact. As for our partners, funders and friends globally that continue to hold our hand in unwavering support of our work, thank you! We are always entirely grateful and keep it coming.

You can now also access an online copy from our website. Please don't hesitate to send in your reactions about what you think of this publication.

Have a nice read!

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Kasha".

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# FROM THE RUNWAY TO THE SLUMS OF NAIROBI



**W**hat started out as fun and exciting day for Shamran ended in total disarray when his family threw him out of home. In 2016, Shamran, a vibrant young man contested for the highly sought-after Pride Uganda title. Unfortunately, on the night of the pageant, the venue was raided and Shamran ended up behind bars.

By the time he was released, his family who had not been aware of his sexual orientation knew about both his arrest and his attraction towards men. Being from a strict Muslim family, his father wanted nothing to do with him and threw him out. Shamran went to stay with a friend but could not stay for long as the neighbours were becoming increasingly hostile.

He then opted to move in with his boyfriend who even helped get him a job as a mobile money operator. However, his parents found out about where he was working and came by day after day, shaming and insulting him. Soon everybody around knew that he was gay.

His boyfriend afraid that he was putting himself in danger asked him to find another place to live as he could not put up with such harassment from Shamran's parents. With nowhere else to turn, Shamran picked up few of his belongings and the little savings and headed to Nairobi.

Shamran is one of the few lucky ones- on arrival, he was registered and granted refugee status and shortly after that he was issued a movement pass. His asylum application process has moved faster than

most and Canada has granted him a safe haven to rebuild his life. For now, he awaits his medical examination and communication about his travel date.

Asked if he is still in touch with his family, Shamran explained that for a while he was communicating with his elder brother. However, the two fell out and cut all forms of communication after he (the brother) gave Shamran's contact to their parents who then resumed harassing him.

Shamran hopes that one day, everyone will be able to realise that gay people are as normal as can be. It is also his prayer that more parents will start to listen to their gay children and talk to them openly instead of just rebuking and cutting them off. ■





# DETERMINED TO MAKE A BETTER LIFE

Joel (not real name) was a common face in the Kampala party circles and he never dreamed of leaving a city of friends he loved so dearly. He worked with several LGBT+ organisations and was actively involved in community work. All this fell apart when he started getting attacked constantly - it went from emotional to verbal, psychological and eventually physical. He started moving houses every two months to ensure his safety- something that was frustrating both emotionally and financially.

"I used to go to police for help, but nothing changed. I was once insulted in front of my father's gate! I faced stigma from the people that I know and my family. One boy hit me with a stone and that's when I said enough is enough," Joel narrates.

When the abuses got to a physical point, Joel knew it was time to rethink his life. It was then that he decided to go to Nairobi to seek asylum. He dreams of a time in life when he can be true to himself and live without harassment and discrimination.

To get to Nairobi, Joel sold his phone and few belongings to raise money for transport. Thankfully, he was in touch with a few of his friends who were already in the system and these helped him settle in as well as showed him the ropes. He moved in with his two friends but soon, they asked that he starts to pull his weight or else relocate to Kakuma- this was not an option Joel was ready to take.

He knew he had to find a job to be able to afford his share of the rent as well as contribute to the food and bills. Like many of the people in his



## KAKUMA CAMP KENYA

P. Meinhardt/Hanicap International  
<https://humanity-inclusion.org.uk>



situation, Joel turned to sex work - a venture he says was lucrative but very dangerous.

Asked why he decided to stop sex work, Joel narrates, "I was tired of risking my life for material gain and knew I had to stop sex work. I had also started getting sexually transmitted infections - my health was at stake and I totally hated myself. This work led me to becoming an alcoholic, a drug addict and my behaviour changed. One day, my friends confronted me and said I had changed- I was no longer the bubbly social Joel they knew. This was a reality check for me."

A few weeks after this, an opportunity opened up. A friend shared information about a job opening - they were looking for an LGBT+ individual that was also well-versed with refugee issues. He applied for the job and got it.

Joel's life has since taken a turn for the better. He however says that working within the Kenyan LGBT community has its downside. "I have been working with the Kenyan community for two years now, but the stigma is something I cannot escape. In fact, it has affected me more. Kenyans always remind us that we are refugees and blame us for anything that goes wrong at work. The insults are very traumatizing. However, I have learnt to keep my eyes on the goal and that is moving on to a better life."

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**I was tired of risking my life for material gain and knew I had to stop sex work.**

Joel's application is now at the embassy level and he looks forward to the decision which will only be made after he has taken his medical examination. He however cautions that this process requires patience. "Most people are impatient, that's why sometimes they demonstrate. I normally advise people who are not born hustlers to go to Kakuma because it is much cheaper than Nairobi. When most people come to Nairobi, they don't know anything about these processes, and they assume everything they need will be provided by UNHCR - they have hopes of getting connections and being helped in terms of housing, health and safety."

Regarding the protests that are usually staged at the UNHCR offices in Nairobi, Joel says the protesters are misled by the other refugees who have been in the system for long. "I think it would be better to sit down and plan on how to do things the proper way. Applying that kind of pressure only sheds bad light on the entire LGBT community from Uganda yet this could be handled in a more diplomatic way." ■



# ATTACKED AND LEFT FOR DEAD

**M**y name is Jean, I am a transgender woman from the Northern part of Congo. I have been living with Angels Camp in Kampala since January 2018. Kampala is a very difficult place for transgender persons to live; I have personally been attacked 3 times. When people see me, they realise that the way I behave or express myself is not as masculine as other men which makes me an easy target.

One day in February 2019, I had a transgender friend over at my home in Nsambya. We watched movies till about 7:00pm and I accompanied her to buy airtime at the nearby shops. A few metres away from home, we saw 3 people pass by and shortly after, we noticed they were following us. At this point, we also noticed that three other people were approaching us from the front.

Out of the blue, someone hit me with a heavy object from the back. I fell down and the others also came and started kicking me. My friend was also being beaten and kicked. One of them said that if I didn't leave homosexuality, they would return and 'finish me off'. kill me.

Fortunately, an approaching car slowed down and the driver flashed his lights after noticing the scuffle that was taking place and our attackers ran away.

This driver saved our lives; he took us to a nearby clinic where we received first aid but we were advised to go to a better equipped hospital since the injuries and bruises were pretty grave and we needed more specialised care.

We had no money to go to the hospital and ended up going back home. I kept vomiting blood for the next couple of days until a friend who had heard about the incident came to check up on me. He is the one that took me to Bebe (a leader at Angels camp) who quickly rushed me to Mulago with support of Refugee Law Project. The doctors found that I had a double fracture. I stayed in Mulago for a few days.

When I reported to the police, I didn't disclose that I am transgender. I just told them that I was attacked because of the uncertainty of what will happen since I am not a citizen and the existence of these anti-gay laws. ■





# ALIENATED BY FAMILY: Reagan holds onto a hope of starting over far away from home

**A**mateur Chef Reagan (not real name) loves to cook and this is the only thing that seems to bring him joy and hope as he navigates the refugee life that he suddenly found himself in. He had high hopes of becoming one of Uganda's most revered chefs, but life was not to work out that way.

Growing up, Reagan had feminine features and behaved the same way. At school, he was always taking up girl's parts during drama and spent most of his time in the company of girls. As far as Reagan is concerned, there is nothing male about him except for his biological male parts. As a first born, he tried his best to hide this side of him because he did not want to cause any trouble.

While he had had same sex relationships for most of his adult life, he only had what he calls closed-door relationships – he had never publicly been with a man. During the Christmas break of 2017, he went to a nearby bar with his-then partner. Their rather engrossed dancing must have caught the attention of several revelers making them suspicious. When he went to the bathroom, his partner followed him and caught up in the moment, the two started kissing only for a waiter to walk

in on them a few of minutes later.

The waiter screamed at the top of his voice and suddenly people flooded the washrooms. Reagan remembers people raining punches on him, kicking him before he was hurled into the bar's open space where they continued beating him.

Reagan was born and raised in Wandegaya where his father is a famous carpenter. So many people knew him. Before he got home, the news of what had transpired at the bar had already reached his father. The neighbors and his stepmother were very angry and told him there was no way they would allow a homosexual to continue living amongst them. His father threatened to burn his house down. He quickly packed up a few of his clothes and went to his partner's home where he thought he would be safe.

He narrates:

"You will never know someone's true colours until you are in trouble. My partner gave me a place to stay but said I needed to leave within a week because he was not going to risk outing himself to his family. I stayed for two days but he didn't give me a single thing to eat during that time. I had no money but there was

no way I was going to starve to death. In the evening of the second day, I begged him to give me some money to help me find a cheap room to rent promising to pay him back when things settled down. That is when he suggested Nairobi. He explained the refugee and asylum process, and in that moment, it sounded like the god-sent solution to my problems."

"I left for Nairobi that very night and it took me a month to register as a refugee with UNHCR. I have since had an interview with the Canadian Embassy and now I wait."

To make ends meet in Nairobi, I have put my culinary skills to use. After I had arrived, I used to cook for my friends and soon, word went around that I was actually very good in the kitchen. People started hiring me for community parties and events, and a few private cooking gigs. From the money I have made, I am thinking of investing in a roadside chicken business but currently, I'm still doing market research to make sure I do not lose my meager savings."

Reagan is holding onto hope, waiting on the process with the Canadian Embassy to come to fruition so that he can carry on with his life. ■

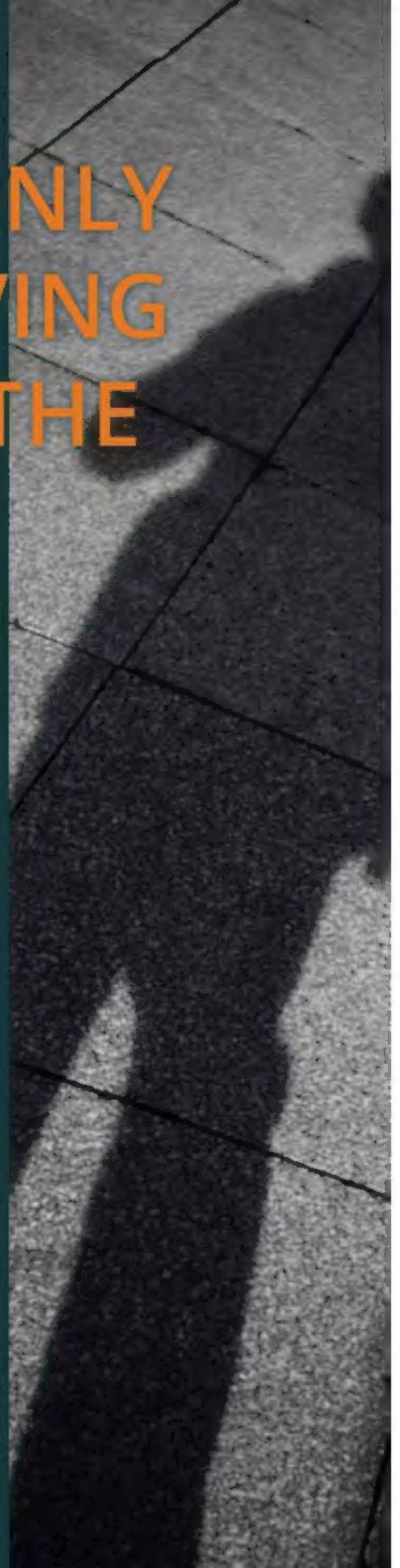


# WHEN YOUR ONLY "CRIME" IS LOVING SOMEONE OF THE SAME SEX.

My name is Kakanyisa Apollo, I come from western Uganda. When I was 18 years old, I had a consuming urge to hug and lie in bed next to boys. I have never been attracted to girls. I have had several secret gay relationships because I did not want to be outed to family and friends.

On Christmas of 2017, I invited my boyfriend, who was known to my family as a close friend, to celebrate with us and he ended up spending the night. During the day when some of my family members went to church, I stayed in my bedroom with my boyfriend and we had sex. My young brother, who had also stayed behind, walked into us having sex and was shocked at what he saw. When everyone else came back from church, my brother rushed to inform my mother of what he had seen. I was so ashamed that I ran away from home for a day. On my return home, I was called for a family meeting - all family members present were furious with me. My uncle started beating me and threatened to report my actions to the police. I ran away from home and went to live with my boyfriend to whom I mentioned the whole story. He suggested that we run away from the village and head to Kampala for our safety.

We stayed in Kampala for about 2-3 months before I bumped into my sisters and tried to hide. My sisters showed no hostility and acknowledged seeing me and said everything was okay, I didn't need to hide. I realized that since they had noticed me and knew I was in Kampala; it would not be long before they would start looking for me. My boyfriend suggested we seek refuge and that's how I ended up in Kenya.







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**My uncle  
started beating  
me and  
threatened  
to report my  
actions to the  
police.**

When we got to Kenya, we were taken to Kakuma Refugee Camp. While in Kakuma, I fell in love with another boy and we started a relationship. His brother got to know about us and reported to the police who then arrested me. The police also accused me of using my boyfriend's money and asked me to pay it back. I explained to the police that I was in a relationship with him and did not take any money. They ignored my plea and still demanded that I pay back the money which I did not have. I was taken to court and found guilty of a theft and from 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018 to 12<sup>th</sup> March 2019, I resided in prison. When my boyfriend went to court and told them that he had forgiven me, I was released. My first boyfriend, who I had travelled with from Uganda, found out about all this and broke up with me. I was then relocated to Nairobi from Kakuma camp.

Currently, my settlement process hasn't been worked on and my movement pass has expired. With the lack of proper documentation, I am forced to stay indoors. I have hope though – I see future me living in a place where LGBT persons are free to do what they want without discrimination. ■



# LIFE AS A TRANS REFUGEE ACTIVIST

**M**y name is Julie Reid, a trans refugee activist. I came to Nairobi in August 2017 but at the time, UNHCR had stalled the registration process. I eventually got registered in January 2018 when registration resumed.

Back home, transgender persons live with a high risk of being attacked. Most times when Police arrests us, they parade us before journalists and claim we are fraudsters who change the way we dress to fleece people. A friend of mine got lynched and was set on fire because people thought she was a

man trying to steal money from fellow men. All her efforts to explain that she was transgender fell on deaf ears and she was left for near-dead.

Such incidents had become too common and I had received many threatening messages from unknown people. I had to leave Uganda before I got attacked or even got killed. I left for Nairobi immediately.

Being a refugee here is not any easier, that's why we are all hoping that UNHCR finds a way to speed up the asylum processes.

Just recently, I was arrested while wearing leggings and a dress and was taken to a male prison. There, I was undressed, tortured and humiliated. This is not the only time I've been arrested in Nairobi.

Two weeks ago, we went to the United Nations offices to demonstrate because we had nowhere else to turn to. We were arrested and taken to Kelelesha Police Station where we spent the night. The Police was forced to release us the following day as they had no charges against us.

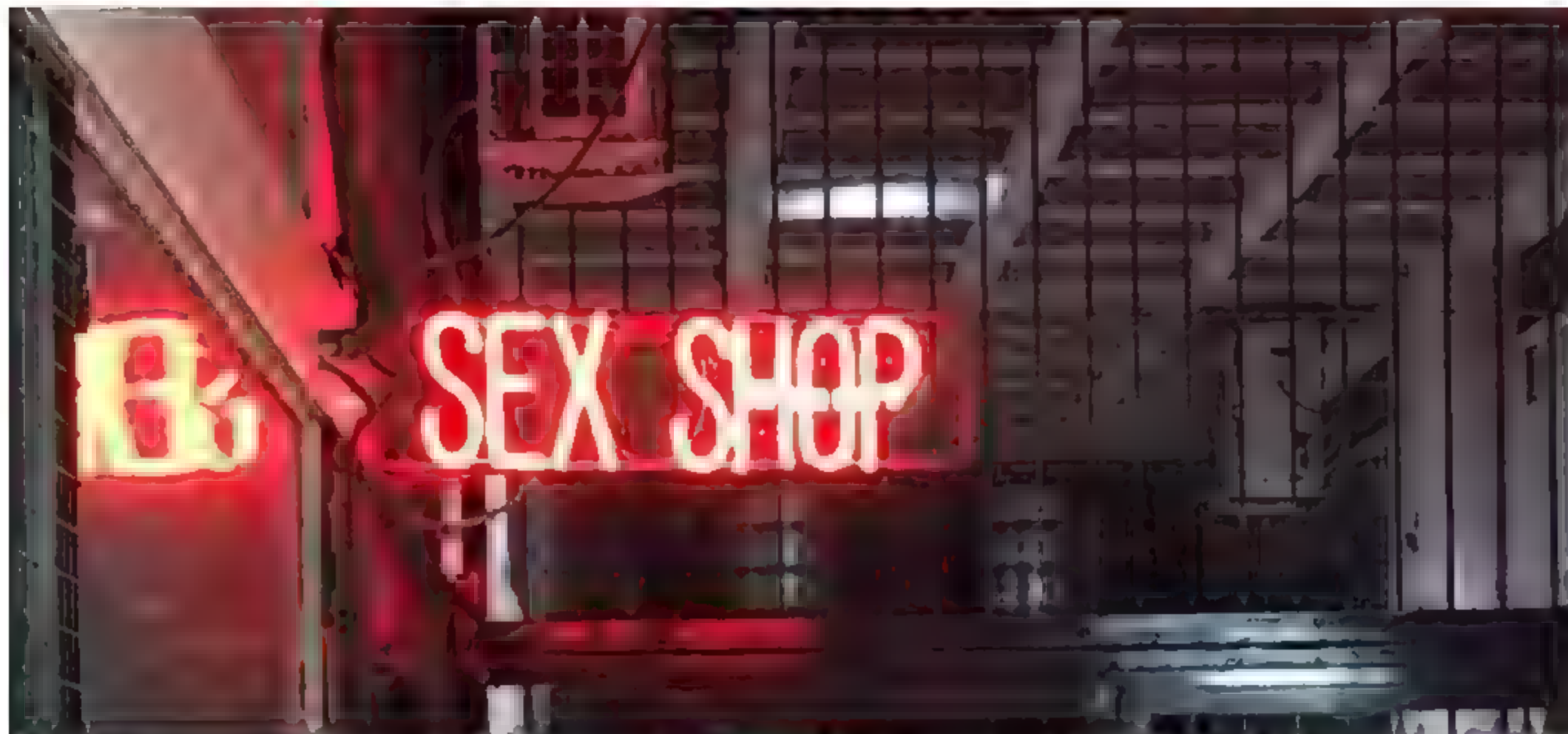
The Police has also previously tried to take my fingerprints, but I refused because this would automatically stall my asylum application. If the government has your prints, they won't allow you to exit their country because the system shows there is an open case against you. Once, while I was at a Court prison during one of the cases I've been involved in, I told the guards I was transgender so that they could put me in the appropriate cell, but they had no idea who a transgender person is. They undressed me before my fellow inmates and each time a new officer came in; they would undress me again. I was humiliated and turned into a laughingstock.

One of our biggest hindrances in Nairobi, especially as activists, is our failure to integrate into Kenya's LGBT movement. We would very much like to be associated with our Kenyan counterparts, but they rarely want to associate with us. It would be great to have their support at the very least. ■





# WITH NO WORK AS AN URBAN REFUGEE, SEX WORK IS HOW YOU SURVIVE



23-year-old Moses (not real name) fled to Kenya after he was outed to his family. Having struggled with his sexual identity most of his youth, he made sure that his parents never found out about his love for the same sex.

Moses was living in his father's boys' quarters and had friends come over often to visit like most youth his age. Unfortunately, one day, their gateman caught him making out with one of his guests and quickly alerted his parents. Before long, the entire village knew that Moses was gay, and he could barely leave the house without someone insulting him or threatening to kill him.

Scared for his life and frustrated from the daily insults from his parents, Moses moved in with one of his friends along Salaama Road, a Kampala suburb. For a while, things settled down until the landlord evicted them for being homosexuals.

Moses then approached several LGBT organisations for relocation assistance but his efforts didn't yield any results. Tired from

moving from one friend's home to another every night, he decided to go to Nairobi and apply for asylum. He arrived in Nairobi mid-2014.

"The hardest thing about being a refugee is living in the camp," says Moses. "In Kakuma, I didn't have any source of income especially after UNHCR got rid of the monthly stipend we used to receive," he adds. "Besides that, the camp is a very homophobic environment - we are discriminated against and often times, we get beaten and are treated with contempt."

Moses left Kakuma and went back to hard, expensive Nairobi.

"Now that I'm an urban refugee, I am engaging in sex work to be able to meet my needs. I am not proud of myself for doing this, but I have to survive - I have rent to pay and I have to eat," he says.

"I am hoping that my application will be considered soon so that I can leave Nairobi and start a whole new life. I still hold hope that everything is going to be alright," says Moses. ■





# SODOMIZED AND TORTURED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

**M**y name is Zuba. I am Congolese by nationality, and I have lived in Kenya since 2009 after my family threatened to kill me for being homosexual. I came to Kenya when I was still young. I encountered so many challenges on my way from Congo - worst of which was at the border where I was beaten and sodomized. I was 17 at the time and while trying to cross from Congo into Uganda, I was raped by more than three policemen. They held me in a darkroom and blindfolded me.



As one after the other took turns on me, I kept slipping in and out of consciousness. After about two nights, they came in with huge sticks and started beating me. I remember hearing them say they hoped they had raped the homosexuality out of me. I still have a huge scar on my neck from all the beatings.

I stumbled out of that room, my vision blurred and wounds stinging. I don't even remember how I got to River Lakigivu but when I came to, I was surrounded by fishermen. These men were the kindest people I've ever met, and they saved my life. They nursed me back to health and gave me a little money that got into Uganda.

Uganda was not any better because at the time, LGBT persons were being attacked. To stay safe, I decided to proceed to Kenya where I registered as a refugee. When I was taken to Kakuma, I settled in with the Somali community and soon a relationship developed between myself and one of the Somali boys. We grew very close

and did everything together - I guess this is what raised his parents' suspicion. One morning after my boyfriend had spent the night in my tent, a group of Somalis attacked us and beat us up. I was arrested and chased away from their community.



*It became clear that I could no longer survive in the camp*

I sustained serious injuries from this attack but the Police and the UNHCR post in Kakuma did nothing. I had secured a job with GRS Refugee Services as a Mental Health Supervisor and soon after the attack, my boss heard rumours that I was gay and terminated my contract.

I then found another job as a barber in one of the camp salons. Unfortunately, a few months later, a client confronted me about my sexuality and to protect his business, my Kenyan boss fired me. I was back to square one.

It became clear that I could no longer

survive in the camp. A few of my friends and I organized funds and we went to the UNHCR offices in Nairobi where we requested to be relocated to the urban district.

All the things I have gone through have greatly affected my mental health - it is very difficult for me to trust anyone because I think they have sinister motives just like the policemen

at the Congo border. I have just started receiving counselling, but I still wake up screaming in the middle of the night. I hope that eventually, these nightmares will fade away and I will live freely, without looking over my shoulder all the time.

As far as relationships go, I have lost hope. I made a conscious decision not to date, at least not while I'm still a refugee because it is difficult to meet a genuine person. Besides, I must focus on healing my own mental issues before I can take on the stress of a relationship. ■



# Light at the end of the tunnel

**G**rowing up, I always knew I was attracted to men and I always felt that I should have been born a woman. I preferred wearing dresses and enjoyed playing girls' games. I would secretly try on my sisters' clothes and the feeling this little game of mine gave me cannot even be described. I was the happiest in these stolen moments.

For the longest time, I tried to keep these feelings to myself. I even married a woman and together we have three children. My wife was a good woman, but she eventually found out about my side relationships with other men and to her dismay, I revealed to her that I was transgender. She could not stomach the thought of being with a transwoman and left me. I have been taking care of our children ever since.

My parents at first assumed we had fallen out due to marital misunderstandings and didn't know the real reason as to why my wife had left me. The truth soon came to light. My children and I used to live in the same compound as my

parents. We had a house help called Yasin, and I was very attracted to him. One night when my parents were away, we shared a bed. I got carried away and started touching him, but he pushed me away. As soon as my parents returned, Yasin reported me. My father, a very staunch Muslim was furious. He said he would rather kill me than have a homosexual son walking around and bringing him disgrace and curses. He called me the devil's agent and asked me to leave his compound immediately. He also didn't want anything to do with my children either for he claimed they would bring bad luck upon his household.

We moved to my sister's home in Makindye where we lived for a few months. The strain of having four more people in the house started to affect her marriage, so I had to leave. She however agreed to stay with my children.

I left and started doing Karaoke in Makindye to support my sister with money to raise the children. It was while doing Karaoke that I met a man that I fell in love with. He was from Mbale and convinced me to go back with him. Initially, everything was rosy - he took care of me and gave me money for my kids. But like most good things, it was not to last. We started arguing a lot and he would beat me whenever we argued, so I left him.

With my relationship over, I started to seriously think about how I could make ends meet especially with my children's school tuition. I had already started transitioning and that made getting a job in Uganda very difficult. So, I decided to come to Nairobi and apply for asylum to a place that would accept me for who I am and even give me better opportunities.

I registered with UN, and I soon got a grant to start a business. I started a business in Kangeme market vending food and for a while it was doing well. I also started a relationship with another Ugandan LGBT refugee who supported me and helped my business grow for a while. However, our place of work was broken into and vandalized by transphobic people and we lost everything.

We reported the incident and thankfully managed to get another grant. We relocated



to Kangwali where we resumed business. I was confident that my business was in safe hands, so I decided to go to the border to meet my sister and my children.

On return, I found out that my boyfriend had a new lover and had rented a house for him in Kabiria, using money from my business. We

broke up immediately.

I have been very lucky with my asylum application process - I have already finished all the necessary interviews and my application was accepted by Canada. Right now, I am just waiting for the visa. ■

## HOME WAS YOUR REFUGE NOW THEY CALL YOU REFUGEE

Home is a language  
you grew in your mouth  
that no longer exists anywhere  
but inside your mind and soul

Home is where  
you held so much grace and love  
when it was all around you  
and you were home

Home is now a language  
a story of where you were but  
now you are not there  
it's a story of where you were but  
now you are not there  
it's a story of where you were but  
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Home is now a language  
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**BM: Tell us about yourself.**

**RM:** My name is Rashid and I am a refugee. I have been here for two years and seven months. I have gone through quite several challenges especially being that I am transgender. Most of the people in the community are transphobic. We get beaten, thrown at stones and sometimes we get evicted from premises when it is found out that you are Ugandan because they know most Ugandan refugees are homosexuals. Even when you report the assaults to the authorities, they side with the perpetrators instead of you the victim. When you take the matter to UN, they only advise you to relocate without giving you any funds to do so. Instead, they tell you to go to camp which also isn't a safe space for the LGBTI persons. Recently there was one colleague of ours who was killed for being transgender after the Kenyan High Court refused to overturn the law criminalising homosexuality. UN is also no longer registering any new asylum seekers, and many of the refugees here who have already got done with interviews have not been resettled yet.

**BM: In which year did you leave Uganda?**

**RM:** I left Uganda in 2016

**BM: Why did you decide to come to Kenya?**

**RM:** The difficult life I went through while in Uganda forced me to decide on relocation. My

father is a big person within government and when my family found out about my sexuality, they disowned me. Because my father is well known, my story featured on NBS TV. All my relatives forsook me and were not willing to take me in. I was regarded as a curse. I was beaten up so badly by my father and family members, I had to run for my life. The police captured me and put me into custody. Eventually when I was out, I went to my auntie's place, while there she tried to poison me.

*After eating  
she told me  
to go and die  
from out; that  
I couldn't die  
in her house.*

**BM: How did your family get to find out about your sexuality?**

**RM:** They had always been suspicious about my closeness to boys. Plus, I used to get gifts from my boyfriends, and they wondered how I



used to afford them, yet I wasn't working. I don't know how they got to find out the password to my phone but when they did, they accessed most of the information that showed the proof that I was homosexual. That was 2016 October.

**BM: *When you ran away from home and went to your auntie's, what happened next?***

**RM:** I went there, and she cheerfully welcomed me. I did not suspect what she was planning on doing or that she might cause me any harm. She told me to go take a shower and after that she gave me food. I had no idea the food was poisoned. After eating she told me to go and die from out; that I couldn't die in her house. She said that I had ashamed her family and it was better for me to die off than stay alive as an abomination. Shortly after that, I started feeling a bit of nausea and saliva welled up in my mouth. I experienced severe stomach pain and felt so powerless that I could hardly walk. The next time I became conscious, I was in Nsambya Hospital and a certain gentleman who identified himself as Akampa Julius told me he had found me unconscious alongside the road. He inquired as to how I had come to eat poisonous food, but I lied to him because I feared what would happen next in case, he found out the whole truth. I told him I was from Masaka and had come to Kampala in search for money. Julius and his wife gave me money - about one hundred and eighty thousand Uganda shillings and advised me to go back home. I thought about going to Tanzania where my mother's family is but then gave up on the idea after considering it for a second because I feared they might also have got to find out about my issues. I decided to come to Kenya instead. I got a taxi to Malaba but I had to disguise myself so no one would recognize me. Upon reaching the boarder, I called up a certain friend of mine and he told me to continue to Nairobi where I should look for UN offices and register as a refugee. In Nairobi, the people I asked for directions from robbed me of my money and I remained penniless. I spent like a week in Nairobi roaming the streets with nothing to eat. I was like a mad person. I moved around asking for directions to UN and was told to go to Westlands. It was quite a long journey, but I made it on foot because I had no money for transport. When I reached, I talked

to the security personnel there who told me to first go register at Ras, get documentation and then get back. I didn't know where Ras was nor did I have any money to take me there. When I was still stranded there, by chance I happened to notice some other Ugandans who had also come to register. One of them escorted me to Ras, we got the proper documentation, came back to UN and then got registered. I started staying with a friend of mine, but one-day people beat us up and burnt everything in the house. We got banished from the village. I was arrested and put in prison for about two weeks. With the help of some friends, UN came and got me out of prison.

**BM: *If UN is no longer providing any stipend, how now do you survive and pay for rent, foods and all these other bills you're supposed to pay for?***

**RM:** I get money mostly through sex work. I connect with people on the Apps like Grindr or Facebook. I use some of the money I'm paid for food and the balance I clear rent.

**BM: *Do you think people confusing trans people with gay people has negatively impacted you personally?***

**RM:** Yes, totally. As a trans person, I am a woman, not a man. People who assault us refer to us as "shoga" meaning that you are a man who loves fellow men. We the transgender people are mostly the ones who are targeted by the homophobic people yet those who are gay are usually unnoticed and therefore not subjected to such attacks.

**BM: *Is there anything else you'd want people to know?***

**RM:** UN should be considerate towards us and the situation we're going through. They should quicken the process for resettlement so that we escape the hostile environment we are exposed to now.

**BM: *Thank you Rashid.*** ■



# WHY I FLED MY HOMELAND

Quotes from interviews with LGBTQ+ Refugees in Kenya

The difficult life I went through while in Uganda forced me to decide on relocation. My father is a big person within government and when my family got to find out about my sexuality, they disowned me. Because my father was well known, my story actually featured on NBS TV. All my relatives forsook me and were not willing to take me in. I was regarded as a curse. I was beaten up so badly by my father and family members, I had to run for my life.

RASHID

After school in 2009, I met several LGBTQ+ identifying persons and quickly became involved in the community. I made many friends, some of whom are activists. During one of the court hearings on the Anti Homosexuality Bill, I was captured in a video that was shown on TV while my parents were watching. It was a terrible moment as they questioned why I was in court during the hearing of such a case. This confirmed to some people who had long suspected that I was gay. I left home and moved to a community organization that sheltered me for some time. While there, I was advised to first go to Kenya as the situation calms down. During my stay at this organization, my brother traced me until he found out where I was staying. He wanted to come and break the house and caused a big scandal. I was given a bus fare and I came to

Nairobi

CP

You see, I am someone with a family. I had to be very secretive about my relationship with my now partner. We would often meet on Saturdays after work and spend the rest of the weekend together. I always told my wife and children that I was away on a work errand. This particular Saturday, we were at a certain restaurant called Apollo Restaurant and Bar Guesthouse. It was about 1:00pm and guess the workers became suspicious as we were regular clients. They knocked down the door to the room and caught us in action.

As I fled through the guesthouse's back door, I fell over a charcoal stove. I still have these scars to date and they remind me of that dreadful day. That guesthouse was in our neighbourhood and I knew every one of my family members would soon find out about this secret that I had guarded all my life. I knew I would not be able to take the torment that came after that and I decided to flee.

IBRA



My sister landed on my phone and accessed my messages. She found a conversation between me and my boyfriend and showed it to our parents. That is when they realized I was gay. They immediately called for a family meeting and everyone started questioning me. Dad got so annoyed that he kept on asking why I had ashamed. I was beaten by mum as she demanded for confirmation if everything they had seen and read in my phone was true. After serious beating on three separate occasions, I confessed that I was gay. I was chased away from home and with nowhere else to go, I decided to join my friends who were already in

Nairobi  
JOVAN

came to Kenya in 2011 looking for a job due to the discrimination that was taking place in Uganda. My town was religious and I was always seen as a disgrace to the family. They would have preferred me to be a prostitute than having a gay person in the family. After sharing with my friends about what I was going through and one of them told me about the country Kenya where LGBT people can go and be safe. I decided to move to Kenya and I have never looked back.  
ERIC

I am a 32-year-old transwoman born and raised in Malindi with my two siblings. Upon my mother's death, I started living with my brother in Ndeeba where I remained from 2000 to 2013. Eventually, I moved in with a friend of mine who was unfortunately being blackmailed by a young boy. This was unknown to me at the time. The boy reported the issue to Police as a rape case and one day, a police car showed up at the house and rounded us up. As the car drove out of the gate, there was a huge crowd gathered and they started shouting that we were homosexuals who wanted to spoil their children. At the station we were interviewed and then put into custody where we were confined for more than two weeks and all attempts by the legal team from HRAPE to have us released were shut down. I was severely beaten up at the police station while they interrogated me as to whether I knew if my friend was a homosexual or if I was a homosexual myself. I refused disclosing any information despite the torture. On around the fifth day while I was in the cell, a certain policeman came in with safety pins and a pair of pliers. He took my thumb and pierced my nail till the pin went through to the flesh and then started using the pliers to pluck out my fingernails. The pain was excruciating and unbearable, then resolved to just keeping quiet to whatever question he asked. Upon realizing that I was not going to disclose any useful information, the OC of the police station asked that I be brought before him. He asked me the same questions I had been asked over the two weeks they were holding me but I still had no answers. Frustrated, he called reporters from NTV and other media houses before whom I was paraded as a homosexual. With my face plastered all over the media, I had no option but to flee.

VANCOUVER



# For weeks, I was destitute and survived on leftover from hotels

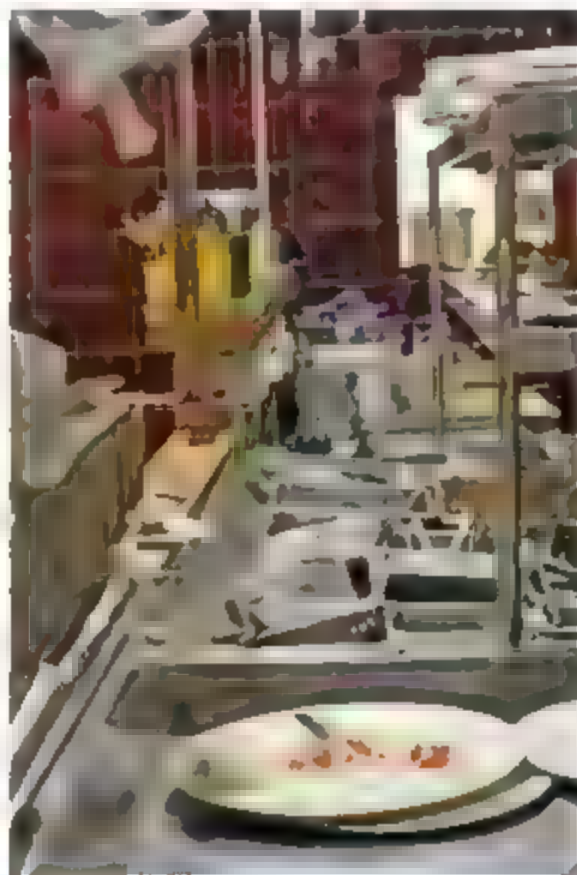
**M**y story of same sex relationship started in 2011 when I was my Advanced Level in Kasantiwona Academy in Luwero. A friend of mine and myself got a deeper understanding of each other beyond friendship. That's how I got into a same sex intimate relationship. I can't plead ignorance because I used to watch a lot of gay porn videos. Our relationship started in the first term and it was in the second term of 2011 on 17<sup>th</sup> July that we were caught red-handed in the school playground by the askari (security guard).

When we were caught, I ran away from school because I knew I could not bear the shame. Going home was also not an option because my mother is very religious, and I knew she would not want anything to do with me. That is how I ended up on the streets of Kampala. I first lived in Kisenyi doing odd jobs, then I heard about a program where footballers get sponsored. I decided to try this out and for a while I managed to put a roof over my head, but the money wasn't enough to cater for all my needs.

To increase my income, I started working in Owino market, ironing for sale.

Gradually, I saved up enough money to start my own clothes business within the same market. Everything started falling in place.

In 2016, I went out with a friend to one of the beaches in Entebbe and he revealed to me that he was gay. He had been struggling with his attraction towards men and needed to confide in someone. We grew closer by the day because we realized we had so much in common and before long, we were in a full-blown relationship. Early in 2019, my partner's sister found us making love and outed us to their parents. His mother got a heart attack and had to be rushed to hospital and his father, disappointed in his son, opened a case against us at Kira Police.



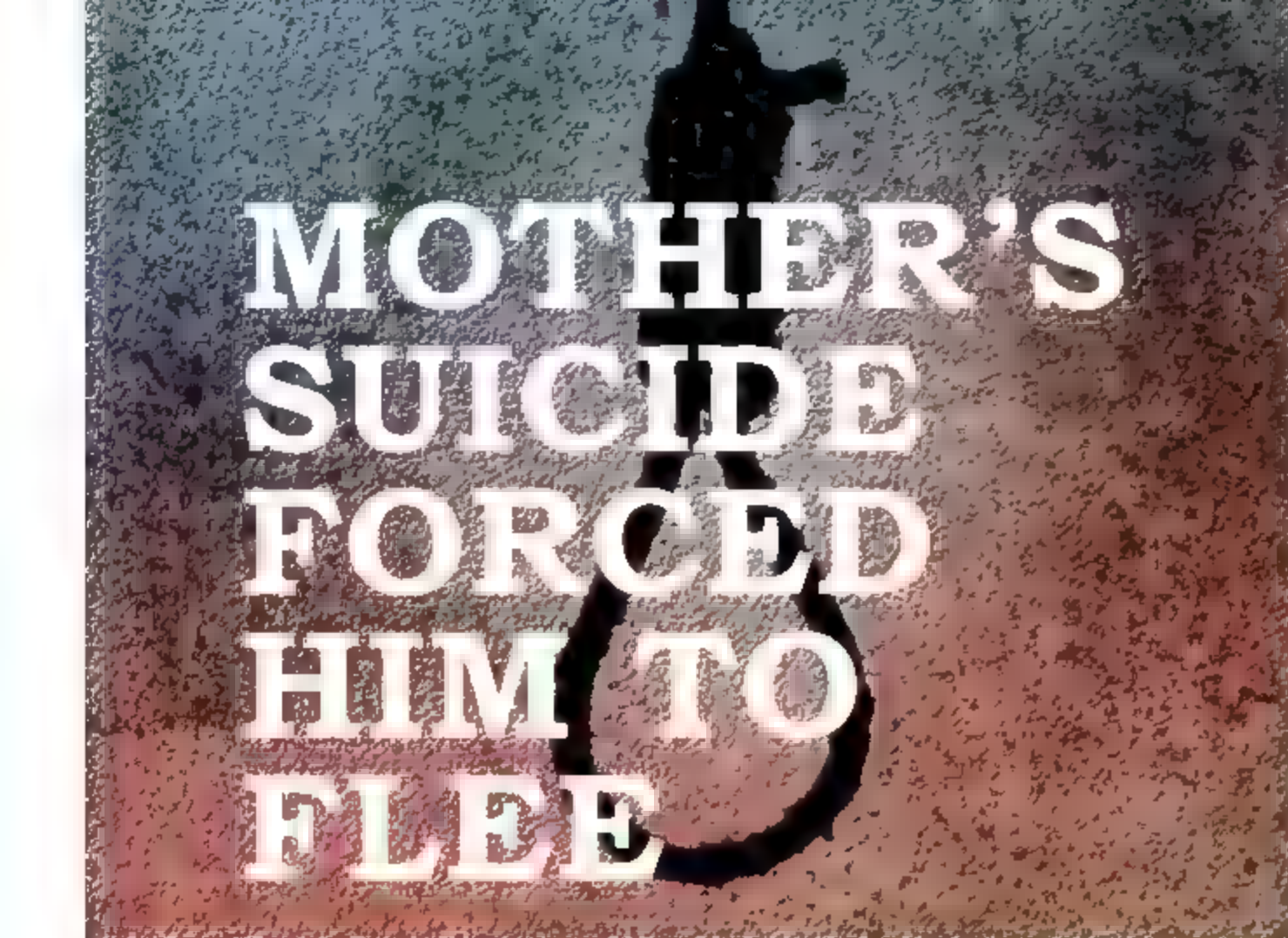
A few days after, his relatives came to my workplace and started insulting me. The people around got to know that I was gay – and it was no longer safe for me to stay in that area. I withdrew the little money I had saved and set off for Rwanda. Rwanda was not very favourable since I do not speak neither Kinyarwanda nor French. I decided to go to Burundi which was not any different. I was quickly running out of money. I then went to IOM on Raj road in Burundi by they couldn't help me but advised me to go UNHCR.

At UNHCR, I was referred to another organization that handles regional refugees, but they could not document my case since I was LGBT refugee. They advised that I go to Nairobi where most LGBT cases are handled.

In Nairobi, I slept outside the UN offices for three weeks because I had completely run out of money and I knew absolutely no one. I survived by gathering leftovers from hotel rubbish bins. Eventually, I was registered and sent to a community house where I have been living since.

I am now embarking on the process of asylum application as I figure out how to make money as it is impossible to survive here without money.





# MOTHER'S SUICIDE FORCED HIM TO FLEE

**P**ius (not real name), a Congolese national who was raised in Rwanda ended up in Nairobi after falling out with his family over his sexual orientation. Two years ago, Pius who had been battling his attraction for men for a while, met a young man in Rwanda and the two fell madly in love. One day, Pius' mother returned home unexpectedly only to find the young lovers having sex. She was clearly heartbroken that her only child had chosen a path she considered shameful. She cried and screamed as she hurled insult after insult at Pius.

Frightened as people started to gather, Pius' lover took off, only to send him a text that he would rather they didn't see each other again as he was scared to be outed to his own family. Pius says he got very disillusioned at this point and decided to leave the house. He told his mother he would return home the following day

after she had had time to calm down so the two could have a rational conversation.

A few hours later, Pius received a phone call from their neighbour begging him to come back home. Thinking that his mother was now ready to talk to him calmly, he rushed back home only to find a larger crowd than he had left. His mother had committed suicide and in the note she left behind, she explained that there was no point of living after bringing such a disgraceful son into the world. With the weight of his mother's death on his shoulders and his family accusing him of being responsible for it, Pius decided to leave Rwanda, a country he says is already too homophobic.

Pius was taken to Kakuma camp when he first arrived in Nairobi but due to the harassment of LGBT refugees within the camp, he was relocated to Nairobi to the Kangame Community House.

Trouble arose with the neighbours as there were many transgender women living at the Kangame House; and after threatening to lynch them and set the house on fire, UNHCR decided to relocate all the transwomen to the Trans Center that is far away from the main city. This relocation was made possible by HIAS which provided the one-time start-up funds to help this group settle into a life outside the camp.

With no job or even movement permit, Pius is helpless. The down payment on rent is soon running out. He has other needs that must be met yet he has no source of income or hope of getting one soon. He says he is living one day at a time and has no idea what is in store for him tomorrow.

He however hopes that Police will issue his movement permit soon so that he is able to look for a job, however odd. He also says with his asylum application already past the embassy interview level, he hopes to be relocated soon because Kenya is not any safer for LGBT identifying persons.

Pius says that the best thing that has happened to him since he arrived in Nairobi is meeting his current housemates. "They are like family to me," he says. He adds, "we understand one another's struggles and do our best to uplift each other. This bond that we have forged is what gets us through the very bad days." ■



# SEXUALLY HARRASED AND OUTED BY HIS BOSS

In 2014, Aggrey (not real name) was fresh out of university with dreams of quickly climbing up the career ladder but all this came crumbling down after he was outed by his boss.

His parents connected him to a family friend who offered him a job. Six months later, his closeted gay boss started blackmailing him.

Aggrey's boss had earlier discovered his sexuality - something Aggrey had worked very hard to keep a secret. In fact, he always made sure he met his boyfriends outside his workplace. One fateful day, he left his phone on his desk only to come back and find his boss scrolling through the gallery and messages. They were explicit messages and images that revealed beyond doubt that Aggrey was a homosexual.

Armed with this knowledge, the boss suddenly stopped paying him and each time Aggrey raised a complaint, he threatened to out him to his parents. He put up with it for a while and kept going back to work but soon realized there was no way he could keep working without pay yet he had needs to meet and bills to pay. Aggrey got to his breaking point when the boss threatened to expose him unless he offered him sex. It was then that he decided to leave work and never to return.

His family, baffled by this decision, tried to talk him into going back to work but Aggrey would not hear of it. In January 2015, as he returned home from running errands, he met his former boss walking out of their gate. His boss went by without even acknowledging him. At that point, Aggrey braced himself for the worst.

He walked into the living room only to find his

parents in total silence - his mother had clearly been crying. Before he could say a word, his father sprang on him demanding to know when he had started 'this habit', and who had initiated him into it. Aggrey initially denied having any knowledge of what his father was talking about, but quickly fell silent when his father produced the pictorial evidence. Realizing that his father's rage was quickly getting out of control, Aggrey's mother came to his defense. After separating the two, she told him he had to go away from him in order to keep the peace.

With nowhere to go, Aggrey went straight to his partner's home but he too was scared because he did not want to get in any trouble since Aggrey's parents now knew his identity as well as his sexual orientation.

*With no more financial assistance from UNCHR, he was quickly in debt over rent arrears and had no food. Aggrey, together with some other urban refugees opted to move into one of the houses where other refugees were living*



At the time, Aggrey had friends who had already fled to Nairobi. When he reached out to them and described his ordeal, they encouraged him to seek refuge there. At first, he was skeptical because his friends were always talking about how they engaged in prostitution for survival. He tried one last time to reach out to his mother, who refused to pick his calls. It was this that prompted him to head to Nairobi.

Upon arrival in Nairobi, Aggrey was taken to United Nations Human Rights Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) where he officially registered as an asylum seeker. The situation at the time was dire as UNHCR had started noticing a trend of fraudulent cases, some of whom were Kenyans claiming to be Uganda LGBT persons. Upon registration, Aggrey was given 12,000 Kshs to help him get back on his feet. The financial assistance gradually decreased until it was scrapped altogether.

With no more financial assistance from UNCHR, he was quickly in debt over rent arrears and had no food. Aggrey, together with some other urban refugees opted to move into one of the houses where other refugees were living as a collective - this was a little out of the city, but it guaranteed safety.

It was agreed that just like all the other residents, he would contribute to house rent, bills and food. While this was also a strain, it was an easier load compared to him living alone. Besides, living with other Ugandans took the pressure and anxiety out of being in a foreign land.

After a while in the new place, the leader of the house left, and they quickly reorganized themselves. That is how Nature Network was birthed. For security reasons, the housemates resolved to stay indoors unless it was necessary for them to leave the premises. To pass the time, they started mimicking local Ugandan TV shows. They would record these using their phones and share the videos often humorous on different social media platforms. Before long, they garnered a following. They expanded their recordings to proper talk shows within the LGBT community. They integrated these with



gossip shows to keep their listeners interested.

Through these shows, Nature Network received grants from AIDS Alliance and Rapid Response Fund. They opened their doors to more refugees that were in urgent need of assistance and provided them with psychosocial support. But like with all funds, the money quickly dwindled, and they went back to the drawing board.

They reached out to former members of the community house that had already been resettled and these generous contributions kept them afloat for a while as many found it impossible to make monthly contributions. Over the year, Nature Network has been involved in poultry projects which, because of the competitive market, have not been lucrative.

Eventually, they got a grant from UNHCR which they used to get cameras, laptops, beds, mattresses; they also got supplementary funding from Refugee Coalition for East Africa. They are currently concentrating on videography and are even hired to provide services within the refugee community. For now, this project is providing food for the house members although the money cannot be stretched to provide rent - a necessity that is still largely shouldered by the housemates.

Away from the house matters, Aggrey's file has been forwarded to the United States Embassy and he awaits his second interview. He hopes to be relocated mid-2020 and says one of the things he intends to do when he is granted asylum, is to raise funds for Nature Network because he knows how important the sustainability of these houses is to the LGBT refugee community. ■



# FLOGGED AND SHAMED:

## Chris won't be going back home anytime soon

**M**y name is Chris. I have been in Nairobi for one and a half months. I came in to start with my process after I was caught by my elder brother and all the rumours my relatives had heard about me were discovered to be true. My elder brother begged to take me to different religious leaders to pray for me and exorcize me of all demons, which I didn't agree to. My adamancy led to a clan/cultural gathering in Mbale. I was tortured and beaten with the hope that it would make me quit and change my sexuality. I got bruises on my face because of the flogging, but what hurts the most is that I put at risk the only person I had in my corner -my aunt.

I lost both my parents when I was still young, and my aunt took me in and educated me until I finished my diploma. She had plans of enrolling me for a bachelor's degree offered by Compassion but lost hope because of the long processes. She has always been my anchor and greatest cheerleader to the extent that when everyone wrote me off, she still pleaded my case. I remember while I was being flogged, she got slapped by one of my relatives because she was defending me. I recently heard that she was hospitalized, and I know it's because of what I went through, and it is affecting her as well. Regardless of my sexuality and what happened to me in Mbale, we still talk on phone. The torture and hurtful words I received from my relatives became too much to handle, so decided to leave Mbale without telling my aunt.

When I left Mbale, I went to Mukono. With the financial help of my friends from Mbale, I was able to rent a room in Mukono. It has not been easy for me as I have a troubled mind and sleepless nights due to emotional trauma, lack of finances and other needs. I am now in Nairobi and I am still renting a house in Mukono. Plus, I haven't started with the asylum process because

of the arrests that are taking place right now.

When I was in Mukono, I worked at Total petrol station. My friends used to come to my workplace during the night shifts and this exposed me to my colleagues. You know how we kuchus are when we know where a fellow kuchu stays or works. They make it routine to drop by to see you and you know that we kuchus can't be controlled easily.

There was a one Pastor Simon who used to fuel his car from my workplace and wouldn't want to fuel from other pumps apart from mine. The people who were in his car were gay and their dress code was very telling. Sometimes they would come out of the car to go buy some things from the supermarket and I'd wish the ground would swallow me up. All these incidences continued to raise suspicion and my colleagues would say, "Chris, your friends could be gay." This continued till that time I left my Facebook account open on my phone, and one of my colleagues went through my messages and photos. They started to speak ill of me, and I could not take it anymore. I waited for my salary that month and when I received it, I quit.

I feel insecure while in Uganda because of what happened at my former workplace. Sometimes I think that my neighbors might be aware of what happened at my workplace. My neighbor started calling me Jane after a boda boda rider whom I sent for a flash disk forgot to bring it and made a comment saying, "oohhhh *nyabo najerabidde*" meaning "oohhhh woman/lady I forgot to bring it" while my neighbor listened. He kept calling me Jane and would sometimes make some remarks like, "Jane have you cooked some food?" This got me asking myself if people around knew about my sexuality. I felt unsafe and decided to leave Mukono and come to Nairobi. There is no place like home but for the sake of my life, I just had to leave. The situation





in Kenya looks quite tough but I can't stay in Uganda.

I came to Nairobi but avoided the camp because of the stories I had heard about life there. No one wants to be in the camp unless you're having wars in your country. As gay people, the camp situation isn't good with all the punishments and heavy work we do regardless of our health situation. Some of us are too weak to be in a camp that's why I have stayed in Nairobi for a month and a half. If I had gone agreed to go to the camp, I would have been pushed to Kakuma.

I came with some money and I will use some of that to go back to Uganda. I want to go back and sell off the assets I left in my house so that I can see what to use that money for in Nairobi. The rent is accumulating, and this is going to be the third month without paying rent. Since I had been paying rent to the landlady for a while, it is only right to go and sort out everything in Uganda, and not leave a bad name before I relocate.

I have not told my aunt of my plans and I feel like I should not tell her right now. I will tell her when I reach the final stages of the process. I can't tell her now because this woman loves me and has raised me up to this stage in my life. Telling her about such news yet she has just left hospital due to the pressure, the news of my leaving would be devastating. I feel my aunt will not understand the whole asylum thing yet, but I pray she will be fine one day and I will

open up to her. Since I cannot go to the village, I sometimes go to her place and she keeps me updated on what's happening in the village. These conversations make me miss my village, but I am all grown up and I must take a decision that guarantees my safety.

I will relocate to Nairobi and start off with the process and see which country they can push me to. I talked to my friend Crane who advised me not to despise any jobs as I cannot get an office job because I am a foreigner and I can't speak Swahili. He asked if I could start making chapattis and samosas since the Kenyans aren't good at making them. If I can get money to rent a place and start up something small, I have no problem with cooking.

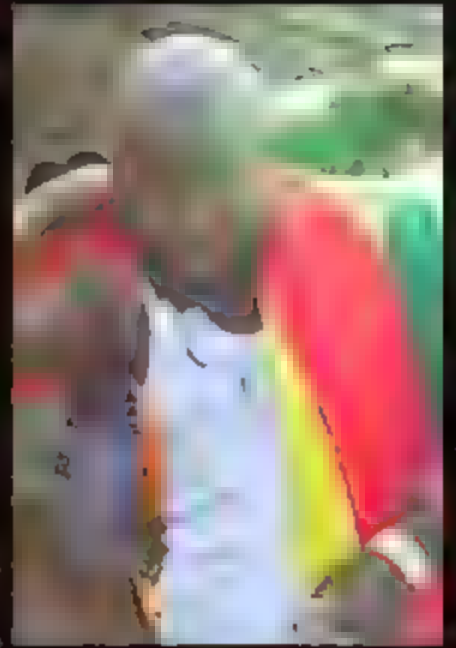
I have met some employed kuchus from Uganda that work in salons and do pedicure and manicure. I have been asking them how they got their jobs and they keep saying their bosses are friendly. I am studying the business environment here in Nairobi as I experience their very cold climate.

I know I'm going to go through bad experiences, but I know I can survive in Nairobi if I have something to keep me busy. I am used to working and that pushes me to look for a job to make some money. So, I have no problem with being here for 6-7 years because I know I will be able to go to some other country where I will be fine and live freely regardless of who I am. ■



# PRIDE IN KAKUMA CAMP, KENYA

#KAKUMA PRIDE# was organized by Refugee Flag Kakuma and Refugee Coalition Of East Africa









# TRUE ASYLUM STORY: Long Road to Liberty

**//** "Your wrists are very small!" she exclaimed as she clamped handcuffs on them. This was a statement I was bound to hear repeatedly for every time my hands were to be chained in those cold metal rings. I had never been handcuffed. It all seemed surreal to me. It must have been the shock or was it the cold. From the moment I stepped off the plane, my whole life became a movie in which my mind subconsciously switched off, as a means of survival for what was ahead of me. What I am going to share below still feels like a movie, only this is my lived asylum reality.

Hello, my name is Qwin F Mbabazi and I am a Ugandan Lesbian asylee in the US. A lot of times you hear stories, little patches here and there of what happens to immigrants but none of that prepares you for the reality. When I got off the flight that cold Thursday morning, I wasn't prepared for what awaited me. It was a long flight, but my day was just getting started. Interestingly no matter how many times one



has travelled customs officers are usually intimidating.

I was denied entry into the country and instead lead to the U.S Customs and Boarder offices at the airport. There were hundreds of people in there, all age groups, wailing babies, different languages and accents being spoken and a lot of worried faces. I thought it would be a short process and I'll be out of there in a bit as the officer asked me to find a seat and wait for my name to be called out. My flight had landed at 11am; I left those premises at 7pm. Phones were restricted, no food, no access to your luggage and it was snowing outside; I was hungry, cold and my hope turned to worry as I saw people cry and plead in front of officers to be

let in.

Seated next to a weary mother of four who only spoke French I started comprehending the situation. Your name is read out loud in front of the crowd and you're asked a bunch of questions. Upon failing this interview, if there's an immediate flight back to your country, you are deported immediately. A lot of people got deported right in front of me. An hour before my turn, the French lady and her kids were informed that they were to be put on a flight back to their country of persecution. My whole body was quivering.

When it was my turn, series of questions that had me shred every single bit of my soul in front of strangers were thrown at me. How my mind managed



to be alert and respond still mesmerizes me. Unlike many of those who had gone before me, I had to do two more interviews with different officers and after what seemed like forever the first officer informed me that I had passed the "first interview" however that wasn't guarantee I was granted stay. Instead I was to be taken to a detention center where I would be fully examined and then I would know my fate.

Detention center sounds soft; I thought it was a refugee camp or something of the sort, but he meant jail – prison; that is where immigrants are processed from, how long I was to be in there - all this, I was unaware of.

"Your wrists are very small" the female officer that was to transport me said. My hands, legs were cuffed. In addition a big, heavy chain was then drawn around my waist, interlocked with my handcuffs and leg chains and I was put at the back of a dark cold van and driven off to a land unknown to me leaving all that I owned behind except for the clothes on my body.

When we arrived at the center and I was hauled out of the van and my eyes were greeted by tall fences and equipped officers in uniform. I had never seen guns that up-close. The only difference I had from the rest of the inmates is that my top had ICE (a uniform for all immigrants in jail) on it. I was placed into a cold cell with barred windows and an old browning urinal toilet. The bed that was barely three by six was made of metal and connected from the cold wall, the mattress, barely two inches. My new belongings included one pair of bedsheets, one pair of shoes, a barely warm sweater, pajamas, the smallest toothbrush that I have ever seen and a plastic tiny comb. My name didn't matter anymore since you are assigned an ALIEN number which I'll always be referred to and prison rules and punishments in case, I broke any. This was my new life for the next six months of my incarceration.

Being an immigrant prisoner isn't an experience I would ever wish on someone else. The other prisoners call you names and yell how you should return to your country. Officers gossip on who is going to be deported next and being locked on an entirely ICE floor is the most depressing space I have ever been my entire life.

**“ My hands, legs were cuffed. In addition a big, heavy chain was then drawn around my waist, interlocked with my handcuffs and leg chains and I was put at the back of a dark cold van...**

So many tears, so many heart-breaking stories yet in that pain you bond with strangers. I felt like I was in a convent with ALL the prayers that were going on; I now understand why prisoners become so prayerful while in there. Hope is one of the strongest weapon inmates hold onto to keep sane and survive prison life. Airport aliens like myself couldn't make calls out because the prison phones don't permit International calls. The immigrant's unit was and is like a sick ward in the hospital, too many broken souls coming and leaving; I had a total on nine cell mates for my entire stay and only one made it out without deportation.

I had no visitors for the only visitors allowed in are lawyers or the clergy and if you fail any of the interviews, deportation. I hated the 6am and 5pm hours of the days; those were the hours when the officer on duty would open one of the cells and yell out someone's name and tell you "Pack it up! Your leaving!" More deportations than freedoms happened during those hours. We would stand by our small doors and peep to bid goodbyes to our fellow immigrant inmates and lie to them that "It's okay" yet in reality we were consoling ourselves for our own fate.

I underwent more interviews and for each interview I was chained up to be transported. When I passed the last interview, I was informed I needed to get myself a lawyer to start preparing my case since I was to go in front of a judge. No phone, no money, no support but here I was being informed that I needed a lawyer ASAP. Those were shaky days.



I was atheist when I got into jail but I have seen God's kindness perform miracles for me that to this day I have no better explanation of how my life changed around except to say that someone out there in the universe has my back. One day I was informed I had visitors and it turned out to be a pair of Jewish clergy who flipped my entire universe to a bright ray of sunshine. We bonded and they got me canteen money so that I could afford basic needs like showering soap and sugar, they never missed a week without visiting. And for that I'll forever be grateful. It's until you are locked up in prison that you'll learn to not take for granted the small things in life like being able to walk and breath freely.

I recall my final hearing in front of the judge like it was yesterday. I had never been in front of such a big, magnificent court room that screamed judgement day. I had never required to be in front of a judge vouching for a second chance to life. This is not what I had envisioned my journey to be like, chained, in prison uniform with two armed guards and a government prosecutor that was there to tell the judge why I needed to be sent back to my country of persecution. The second thing that gave me comfort in this moment of distress aside from my life story was my small army of seven lawyers in the court room that had taken keen interest in my case, prepped with me and my supportive clergy. After an hour and half plus, baring my life and leaving no shred of privacy, after several cross examinations from the state prosecutor, the judge deemed me fit to stay and granted me asylum.

It sounds sweet right; such a great victory after being locked up for six months. Was I happy? Yes, I was relieved, but I was scared too; what next? I had no family, no money on me, no house and no job. These are the challenges a lot of immigrants' face. How do you start a life in a foreign land where you have no ties to the society?

A kind family was willing to give me accommodation but not every immigrant is that lucky. Many are homeless or in shelters until they can support themselves. Sometimes if you are lucky for someone to house you it may be for a very short period or you need to

# ASYLUM

Stand on graves and cast out the  
helpless.

They arrive in waves to the illusion of  
hope.

A 'caravan' of people,  
All begging for freedom,  
But fear not,

They shall be murdered  
for they are evil.

How can they expect asylum, safety &  
security,

from a land built on death?

Where those in power face no scrutiny.

Where an orange haired buffoon can  
thrive & prosper,

But mothers & fathers cannot afford  
a doctor.

Yet still these people come here seeking  
a better life and

how dare they do?

With hands calloused from hard work,

hearts filled with grief,

spirits filled with belief;

Don't they know?

This is a land built out of the flesh of  
martyrs,

On a charter that helps oppress its own  
population,

A country that thrives off  
devastation.

Adapted from Hello Poetry



contribute to the rent of which you probably don't have a job yet. You cannot rent a house fwaana in this country; you need to have credit history! Yes; that was foreign to me and this isn't something you build in a blink of an eye. So yes, you can get a job and still be not be able to rent because of credit history.

Speaking of jobs!!!! Dear God! When you envision immigration, we have that fantasy dream of I'll get a job and life moves swiftly. Despite my education and experience, I faced a lot of difficulty in job hunting. Without a job you can't afford even a mere bus or train pass to take you for job interviews! Did I mention that you need a work permit which ranges from a period of six months and above to be granted? Six months without you affording to buy your own sanitary pads! When you're a foreigner, before hiring you, they always ask for credentials aka government issued identifications. You can't open a bank account or get medication if you don't have a Social Security Number (SSN). It was like walking into a puzzle field, without short cuts or gundi aja kunyamba.

I was desperate to be self-independent and I'll confess I would wake up and apply for ten jobs in a day; that's seventy jobs in a week and in two weeks only one or two responded. I went for interviews where I was turned down because I was either overqualified, or something was missing, or I lacked developed country experience. My confidence was shattered as I fidgeted since my accent is too heavy

for some to comprehend. Not to forget; unlike my mama land Uganda, here you have series of interviews before you land that job. As I write this, I reflect on the fact that I was indeed lucky; I was lucky that there was networking syndrome around me where people kept introducing me to others or talking about me to someone who would then recommend me to someone else. I was taught how to write a one paged resume to apply for a job; imagine all my past seven jobs being fitted on one page. It was this kind network that strangers were volunteering to drive me to interviews. It took four interviews and a period of three months to get the job I currently have. Three months! After my job-hunting experience, I understood why it is difficult for new immigrants to get office jobs; at that a black African woman in a sector that is highly occupied by white people who have gone through schools like YALE or Harvard.

Back home we eat corn for luxury and bread as a morning snack; that is a full meal here. The food is different, the cold weather is challenging. Slight mistakes like driving past a red light or getting involved in a protest can have me deported. Yes, I was granted a second chance in a country very suitable for my sexuality, but that life is lived on caution and bunkeke. Depression is a very easy pit to fall into especially with all this new change and being constantly home sick that I have now adjusted to the workaholic routine and because there's no big family

or big circles of friends you dread the public holidays because you won't have that jolly big celebration.

Despite all that's mentioned above I live to celebrate that my migration had a lot of luck tied to it. I was lucky enough to be granted status however there are those who have been here for over four or five years and they don't even have a case hearing date yet.

A lot of times when mainstream media prints our faces in newspapers and writes captions that are totally misleading and incite homophobia towards one's life they don't think of the harm and the extent to which they disrupt one's life. They never think of the landlords that chase us from their houses or the neighbors that want to lynch us because of this wrong information.

Many LGBTIQ asylum seekers flee to have a life where we are truly able to live as our true selves without having to look over your back all the times, everyone's case is different, and the process is likely to differ; some face harsh times during this transitioning, some may not be granted to stay and others like me; it's sheer luck.

I am grateful that my wrists are indeed small because those handcuffs were very painful that at times while I was seated at the back of that cold van, I would squeeze my small hands out of the cuffs to massage the pain off and then slide them back into the handcuffs as we got to our destination. ■



# OUTED, TORTURED, DISMISSED FROM THE ARMY

In 2007, I fell in love with my very first boyfriend and we dated until 2009 when we parted ways. I dropped out of university due to lack of tuition and reached out to my ex's uncle who is a high-ranking officer in the army. Mind you, this uncle thought that his nephew and I were merely good friends. After undergoing training, I joined the Special Forces Command (SFC) in 2013.

My first station was Kitovu, Entebbe where I met another gentleman that I fell madly in love with. I don't know how my workmates found out that I am gay because my partner and I were very careful. I have a few suspicions on how this information could have leaked but I will never know for sure. This was in 2016 shortly after the presidential elections. I was jailed and tortured - my superiors demanded that I tell them about the LGBT organizing in Uganda which I didn't know much about. Because I knew they would kill me if I didn't give them some information, I ended up telling them about a few of my gay friends in Entebbe.

In 2017, I was dismissed from the army and stripped of all my credentials. That is when the harassment started - I received phone calls from people threatening to kill me. My name and picture were published at all barracks as a part one order- this is what happens when you are dismissed on grounds of immorality. Soon, all my army friends knew about my sexuality. My life turned upside down in a matter of months and with nowhere to hide, I decided to flee to Kenya.

My process has not progressed much - all I have done so far is registration. From there I was sent to Kakuma camp and later relocated to a community house. While most people prefer to be urban refugees, I would rather be in the camp because there, I can keep to myself. As an urban refugee, I just never know who I will run into and that is not something I would like

to happen as I am considered a fugitive back home. But I do not have control over where I get posted.

Had I not been in the army before, I would probably consider going back home because life as a refugee is extremely difficult. But because of my profession, I know for a fact I will not survive long if I return to Uganda and right now, keeping alive is my main focus.

I wish I could find a job while I wait for my asylum application to be approved but without a movement pass, it is impossible. As a man used to providing for myself, it breaks my spirit knowing that I am now relying on the mercy of organisations and well-wishers.

**“My name and picture were published at all barracks as a part one order**

The only thing that's been giving me a little hope throughout this ordeal is my brother back home. While he resents me for my sexuality, he is worried about me and checks up on me through social media. When you are in such a state, this kind of care from a loved one means the world. His communication has kept me sane and hopeful.

I am not the kind of person that loves to laze about all day, and this is driving me crazy. I wish there was a possibility of being relocated to another African country, I would willingly take this option because the process is much faster. I feel like I'm losing so many years of my life. ■



# Gay. Refugee. Jobless:

## *A tale of Heartache*

**M**y name is Sula. I come from a large family - my father was Muslim with many wives, my mother was catholic. Growing up, my siblings and I juggled the two religions - we would sometimes go to church and other times the mosque. At the age of seven, my mum passed on. I found out later while in high school that she died for AIDS. After her passing, we started living with my stepmom. Unfortunately, my father also passed on a little while later. My uncle took me in - he paid my school fees till I was done with university.

Throughout my childhood, I had always been feminine and preferred the company of girls. By the time I joined secondary school, I knew I was more interested in boys, sexually. I felt guilty about my attraction to boys because I was brought up to believe it is the most disgraceful thing I could do. I remember I once tried to talk to my stepmom about it because I was very close to her and she dismissed it as just a phase. According to her, I was just imitating my sisters since I was around them all the time and she reassured me that the phase would pass.

In high school while staying at my uncle's home, my cousin and I would get sexually intimate during the night. We did it for a while and none of us ever spoke about it. This went on for a long time right up to when we were in college and by then it had become more serious because we were now engaging in penetrative sex.

One night, my cousin woke up in the middle of the night, walked up to his parents' bedroom door, knocked and his mother came out. She asked him what was wrong, and he told her that I was forcing myself on him. She and my uncle sat me down and asked what was going on. I knew I had a lot to lose outing him, so I admitted to the allegations and got severe beating. Luckily, they didn't throw me out of the house, they cautioned me against it.

From thereon, whenever I made a mistake or did something that displeased my guardians,

they abused me and told whoever was willing to listen that I was homosexual and was trying to initiate their son into the habit. This went on for a while until I could not take it anymore. I made the decision to leave home even though I was not yet done with school.

I went to a friend's place in Kawempe and stayed there for a while. He also helped me get a job working in a movie library which also had mobile money business. During that time, I got in touch with many Kuchus with whom we'd go to a gay bar in town every Sunday. This was a very fun period because for the first time, I had all the freedom I yearned for and was with people who understood and loved me for who I am.

One day, a house where I lived with some of my gay friends was raided by police and we were arrested. Four nights in a police cell, a team from Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) managed to get us released. I was left homeless and without a job. I opened up to a friend of mine who lives in the US. Together we hatched a plan and that is how I ended up in Nairobi. That friend of mine and I are currently dating, and he remains my most solid source of strength.

I went to the UN offices but was denied registration for over a month during which time I slept and camped right outside their offices until they got me registered I received 12,000Kshs that helped me get a place to stay and meet my basics for a while. However, that stipend was scrapped in January 2017 and I have mainly been surviving off people's generosity. With the language barrier and no movement pass, it's been impossible to get a job here.

I am done with applying for resettlement and now I'm waiting for any of the embassies to show interest. You can never be certain if your application will even be considered but you must keep believing. Until you get a flight date, resettlement is never a guarantee. ■



# SHUNNED BY THE PEOPLE HE LOVED THE MOST

**M**ark is a 25-year-old LGBT refugee living in Nairobi. He has been in Nairobi since 2015, but still awaits UNHCR's decision on his asylum application.

According to Mark, he was expelled from school after his same-sex relationship with a classmate became known. At the time, he was in Senior two and his parents enrolled him for counselling sessions in the hope that his homosexuality would be cured. Nearly a year down the road, the feelings for men only got stronger. Mark's parents decided they could no longer take the shame of living with a homosexual, they asked him to leave their home immediately.

Unprepared for such a brutal decision and

without any funds, Mark wandered the streets for a while. He then remembered hearing of an LGBT youth that had fled to Nairobi and decided to take the same route.

Like all other refugees, Mark registered with UNHCR on arrival in Nairobi. He has never been to the camp and has been an urban refugee since 2015.

He says the hardest thing about being an urban refugee is the homophobia they deal with on a daily basis and the lack of appropriate paperwork to find decent jobs. With HIAS scrapping off the monthly stipend that they accorded refugees, Mark fell behind on his rent and was thrown out of the single room rental in which he stayed.

He approached the leader of Team No Sleep and was given bed space in their community house. At the time of the interview, Mark had been living at the Team No Sleep house for eight months.

Asked why Ugandan LGBT refugees continue to stage protests at the UNHCR offices in Nairobi, Mark who is a regular at these demonstrations said UNHCR doesn't listen to them, barely gives them any answers to their queries and the processes move at snail pace.

He also intimated that the police in Kenya are one of their biggest challenges. The police which oversees processing movement documents for urban refugees but, according to Mark, they refuse to issue these yet they continue to arrest them for lack of these very papers. ■





# LAWYER TURNED REFUGEE

When Maureen met and fell in love with her husband. From the very start, she knew that was the man she would spend the rest of her life with. What she did not anticipate however was the quick turn of events that followed after her father, a pastor, discovered that her daughter's husband was bisexual.

Maureen's father did everything to break the young couple up but because her husband had opened up to her about his bisexuality from the very beginning, the two had discussed at length what it meant for their marriage. So, she stood by her husband. Besides, they were expecting their first child at the time.

Fed up with the torment and constant harassment from her own family, Maureen and her husband left the country to go and start afresh elsewhere. With their meager savings, they relocated to Kenya. Her husband had travelled to Nairobi for ministry a few years prior and had made friends with a pastor he met there. When they reached out to him, he willingly gave them a place to stay in Nairobi. Unknown to them, the pastor who did not know the full story, informed Maureen's dad of their whereabouts. Before they knew it, her dad followed

them to Nairobi and continued the torment.

It was during this time that Maureen's husband learnt that there were LGBT refugees in Kakuma and the two decided to go there until they could figure out what to do next. They quickly registered with UNHCR and were taken to the camp. This is where their little

*...because her husband had opened up to her about his bisexuality from the very beginning, the two had discussed at length what it meant for their marriage.*

girl was born.

With the baby on board, their priority was to ensure her safety. Around the time, there was unrest in Kakuma and their baby was exposed to tear gas. Maureen knew that the camp was no place for a child. She requested UNHCR to allow them to become urban refugees.

While the situation as urban refugees is not any better, especially as they are no longer receiving any stipend from

supporting organisations, Maureen says she is glad her child who is now nearly three years old is living what's closest to a normal life. The toddler has been enrolled in a nearby school although they continue to struggle with the tuition.

"My husband and I do whatever odd jobs come our way. I am a lawyer by profession, but my papers mean nothing here. I will scrub floors, clean people's houses or even wash dishes just to put food on our table and keep a roof over our heads. My husband has also resorted to menial jobs to help make ends meet," the distraught mother of one shared.

Maureen further shared that when the decision to move to Nairobi was made, the only thing on her mind was their safety and peace of mind. She did not prepare herself for what she has been dealing with the last couple of years.

Asked how she protects herself in a marriage where her husband is openly bisexual, Maureen says she knew what she signed up for when she got married. She admits to feelings of jealousy from time to time, but she and her husband have an understanding and have set two rules. If he is attracted to a man, one, he must never throw his side relationship in her face and two, he must always use protection with his boyfriends. It is for this reason that the couple goes for testing more often than most. ■



# QnA: QUEER REFUGEE ON WHY INCLUSIVENESS SHOULD BE PRIORITISED

**BM:** Tell us about yourself.

**HH:** My name is Hadnet Tesfom Habtemariam, I am a 30-year-old Eritrean refugee living in Kampala.

**BM:** What forced you to flee to Uganda?

**HH:** I was a 5th year law student and for my senior year, I wrote a paper titled "Homosexuality Rights in Eritrea". When submitted and presented, there was a big backlash from the society as well as from the Government. As a result of my disability as well as my numerous TV interviews, I was a very visible person which made me an easy target. After endless incidents, imprisonment as well as my school rejecting my research paper (because of government forces), I felt like the only option was to flee.

**BM:** What challenges have you faced as a queer refugee in Uganda?

**HH:** The first half of my stay in Uganda can only be described as a nightmare. When I first arrived, I was still in shock; my life had disintegrated right in front of my eyes. Because of my experience in Eritrea, I requested the Office of the

Prime Minister to send me to a settlement that didn't have any Eritreans so I was placed me in Kyaka II. I had no means of supporting myself and as the only Eritrean disabled woman in that settlement, I faced endless difficulties. The worst bit of it was that I had no way of accessing a toilet. My only option was to ease myself in my small room and then dispose it off in the toilet. The smell in my room, I shall only leave to your imagination.

After 7 months in Kyaka II, I was gang raped by 4 (I think) men. One of them was my neighbor. Previously, whenever I was financially desperate, I would offer sexual favors to my neighbor. Whatever we did never went beyond oral sex. I had never had penetrative sex until this moment.

On this particular night, I was drunk and could not defend myself. When I reported the incident to Kyaka II Police, the officer said, "You are a drunkard, it was going to happen sooner or later. You asked for it."

I informed the Kyaka II hospital that I had scoliosis and my back was in a great deal of pain; I was

referred to Mulago hospital that same day.

While receiving treatment in Mulago, I was staying in a medical hostel funded by InterAid. Survival Instinct kicked in at this point and I told them under no circumstance was I returning to Kyaka II.

**But as an asylum seeker, you are restricted and have very few rights. You can't even buy a sim card or open a bank account.**





The medical hostel housed me for around 5 months. While there, I kept myself safe by making myself as filthy as possible. I would go months without showering, pee and defecate on myself. All this was to keep people away from me.

After 5 months at the medical hostel, they couldn't house me anymore so I was given an ultimatum - go back to Kyaka II or choose to go to

another refugee camp. I chose to go to Nakivali. 3 weeks after my arrival in Nakivali, I was gang raped again except this time I wasn't drunk. The next day, I left all my belongings in Nakivali and I came to Kampala with only a phone and the little money I had to my name. When we reached Kampala, I went to the first guest house I saw, I explained my situation to the manager who said I could stay in one of the rooms. In exchange, he asked for sexual favors. At that point, I honestly didn't care and I agreed to the 'deal'. To cope, I spent my meager funds on alcohol.

At some point, I got alcohol poisoning and the manager panicked! He didn't know what to do so he went to an Eritrean restaurant and explained what had happened. These strangers came to my rescue and rushed me to Mulago hospital.

After I had stabilized, they took me to an Eritrean church where I was offered some help. The day I got alcohol poisoning was the very last time I tasted alcohol; just the smell of anything alcoholic gives me a headache.

This briefly sums up the first half of my stay in Uganda.

**BM:** How far have you gone with the asylum process?

**HH:** I have a refugee status

now. But as an asylum seeker, you are restricted and have very few rights. You can't even buy a sim card or open a bank account. Unfortunately, most of us in the Eritrean community only have asylum seeker documents. There are people who have been in Uganda seeking asylum for more than 8 years. 85% of Eritreans in Uganda get rejected for refugee status and most of those whose applications are granted pay between USD1200 to USD2000.

**BM:** How do you sustain yourself financially?

**HH:** I am an odd person as result of the things I've experienced. These experiences have however come in handy with my job at Refugee Law Project where I am doing my part in making sure what happened to me never happens to anyone else.

**BM:** From your experience, what do you think should be done to better the lives of queer refugees in Uganda?

**HH:** As a queer Eritrean woman living in Uganda, I have yet to find a place that I belong to or one where I can freely be me. The LBQ organizations that I have been introduced me don't cater to refugees so I belong nowhere. To anybody who reads this and has the power to act, please set up a safe space or organization for LGBTQI refugees. There is a strong need for an inclusive support system for this group of people. ■



## KEEPING HOPE ALIVE AMIDST DESPERATION

**2**0-year-old Hash fled to Nairobi in 2018 after she was nearly lynched for being a transwoman. Hash has not had a simple life. Her mother who was a sex worker passed away when she was just 10 years old and she has never met her father.

Following her mother's demise, Hash was taken up by her mother's friend who was also a sex worker. Throughout her childhood, she watched countless men come and go as her guardian engaged in the sex work. In 2018, Hash's guardian asked her to move out, go fend for herself now that she was an adult.

Without any applicable skills, she fell into sex work to pay rent and afford the necessities of life. However, she was getting constantly beaten up as many of her clients claimed she was a man posing as a woman to fleece them. Soon, her neighbours in Kireka, the same area where she grew up, started breaking into her room at night threatening bodily harm. It was clear that she was no longer safe.

Fortunately, Hash had a few Facebook friends who were already in Nairobi and they encouraged her to move there. One of them even offered to house her for the first couple of months as she went through the registration process. The plan was for this friend to meet Hash at the Busia border and they would travel together to Nairobi.

However, things didn't quite go according to plan. The phone number Hash had been given was switched off when she got to Busia. With no money to proceed, she was stuck at the border for three days. Once again, she resorted to sex work to make a little bit of money that would get her to Nairobi.

Thankfully, by the time she arrived in the Kenyan capital, her friend's phone number was back on and she was picked up from the bus terminal. In a matter of weeks, she had finished with the UNHCR registration process, but her process has not progressed since. Because she does not have a proper

source of income, Hash helps out around the community house and does odd jobs like slashing the compound and washing her housemates' clothes. This supplements her sex work income.

When asked if she would consider returning home - to a different part of the city where she is not known, Hash explained that she would rather stay in Nairobi no matter the number of years she has to wait for asylum to be granted because there is nothing and no one to return home to. She is looking forward to a new chapter of her life. She has dreams of getting into activism work specially to help amplify the voices of transwomen in East Africa. She explains that because she has lived through the trenches, she knows firsthand what it is like to be ridiculed and harassed. She will do everything she can to draw attention to the plight of transwomen.

She also hopes that one day, there will be representation of sexual and gender minorities in all African parliaments.





# RESETTLEMENT IS NOT A HUMAN RIGHT, IT IS A PRIVILEGE- UNHCR TO UGANDAN LGBTI REFUGEES IN KENYA

In the months of January and February 2015, the UN noted an immense increase in the number of Uganda LGBTI refugees seeking resettlement to third countries.

Unfortunately, it has been discovered that several of these cross over into Uganda and only return to Kenya in time to claim their monthly dividends. Many have also provided fake physical addresses in the urban areas and officials assigned to the refugees' cases have failed to locate the said.

The relationship between the refugees and the UN has presently been marred by lack of trust brought on by such fraud cases. In light of this, the UNHCR and officials from different agencies handling refugee cases have now made it clear that the good days are over and all Ugandan LGBTI refugees should realize that resettlement is not a human right but a privilege.

On top of the fraud that has consistently characterized this case, Ugandan LGBTI refugees have shown a high level of indiscipline. Two days after being briefed on the proper resettlement procedure, which normally takes between one and three years, they put up a protest in front of the Nairobi office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees; something that greatly proved

the lack of respect for the system.

With the argument that their lives are in danger, the media and social media rants by these refugees have only served to prove that they are also not doing anything to protect their identities and continue to put themselves in easy lines of target.

Many have also left the Kakuma refugee camp, yet the UN does not have any mandate beyond the camp, rendering availability of both protection and services impossible. UNHCR has noted that having already gone over and beyond for the LGBTI refugees, the rest of the refugee community was angered by this special handling to this group that continues to abuse the exceptional treatment accorded to them.

The refugees have now been advised to return the camp and follow the proper procedure that comes along with the resettlement process as well as understand that the third countries consider many factors like education and capacity when dealing with this process. In fact statistics indicate that one out of one hundred people are usually resettled in such circumstances and being that LGBTI refugees are not

a special case, priority may not be given to their cases. They also noted that being LGBTI is not a guarantee for resettlement.

As activists in Uganda, we hope that this issue is sorted out very soon so that the genuine cases are not jeopardized by the fraudulent cases and wish everyone safety and patience in this trying moment.

Below is the full statement issued by UNHCR in regards to the status of the Ugandan LGBTI refugees in Kenya.

## Key messages / Procedures for LGBTI asylum seekers in Kenya

### Introduction

After the passage of the anti-homosexuality Act in Uganda in 2014, a number of LGBTI asylum started approaching the UNHCR offices in Nairobi and Kakuma.

In view of the relative small numbers received during 2014, UNHCR was in a position to prioritize the caseload at all levels of the process as well as to provide them with financial and social assistance. However, while keeping in mind the potential protection needs of this particular population in Kenya, UNHCR and its



implementing partners may have created a pull factor for young Ugandans to travel to Kenya, attracted by automatic assistance and relatively quick resettlement processing.

In view of the consistently increasing numbers of new arrivals since the end of 2014 and in order to ensure that only asylum seekers with genuine LGBTI claims benefit from international protection, it is considered to be of utmost importance that UNHCR maintains the integrity of its programmes, including registration, Refugee Status Determination, Assistance and possible solutions.

*UNHCR processing:*

### **Registration, Refugee Status Determination, Durable Solutions**

Ø The registration process for all asylum seekers in Kenya starts in the Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA), where they will be issued with an asylum seeker pass. After registration with DRA, asylum seekers have the option to approach the UNHCR office. In view of the huge number of asylum seekers from different countries and profiles (including children, women at risk, disabled, sick and elderly persons), new LGBTI asylum seekers will not be immediately registered but be provided with an appointment slip for registration. Their

fingerprints will be taken and a quick assessment will be conducted by UNHCR staff.

Ø On the date of their appointment with Registration at UNHCR, the bio data, photos and fingerprints of asylum seekers will be recorded in the UNHCR database and applicants will be provided with an Asylum Seeker Certificate with their photo. The certificate will indicate that the individual's claim is currently being examined by UNHCR and will include the date of the appointment with UNHCR's RSD unit. In view of the current lack of capacity, the date of the RSD appointment may well be many months

*continued on page 44...*





# We Refugees

I come from a musical place  
Where they shoot me for my song  
And my brother has been tortured  
By my brother in my land.

I come from a beautiful place  
Where they hate my shade of skin  
They don't like the way I pray  
And they ban free poetry.

I come from a beautiful place  
Where girls cannot go to school  
There you are told what to believe  
And even young boys must grow  
beards.

I come from a great old forest  
I think it is now a field  
And the people I once knew  
Are not there now.

We can all be refugees  
Nobody is safe,  
All it takes is a mad leader  
Or no rain to bring forth food,  
We can all be refugees  
We can all be told to go,  
We can be hated by someone  
For being someone.

I come from a beautiful place  
Where the valley floods each year  
And each year the hurricane tells us  
That we must keep moving on.

I come from an ancient place  
All my family were born there  
And I would like to go there  
But I really want to live.

I come from a sunny, sandy place  
Where tourists go to darken skin  
And dealers like to sell guns there  
I just can't tell you what's the price.

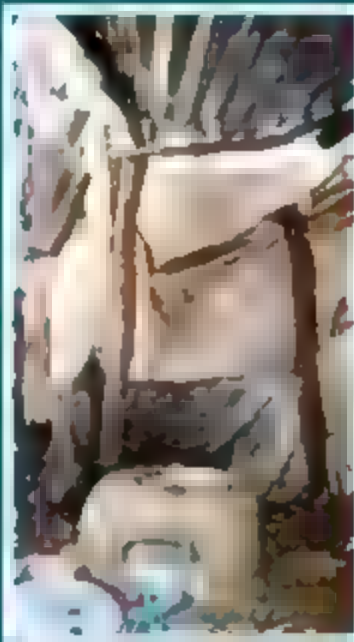
I am told I have no country now  
I am told I am a lie  
I am told that modern history books  
May forget my name.

We can all be refugees  
Sometimes it only takes a day,  
Sometimes it only takes a handshake  
Or a paper that is signed.  
We all came from refugees  
Nobody simply just appeared,  
Nobody's here without a struggle,  
And why should we live in fear  
Of the weather or the troubles?  
We all came here from somewhere.

Benjamin Zephaniah  
ADAPTED FROM VERBAL REMEDY

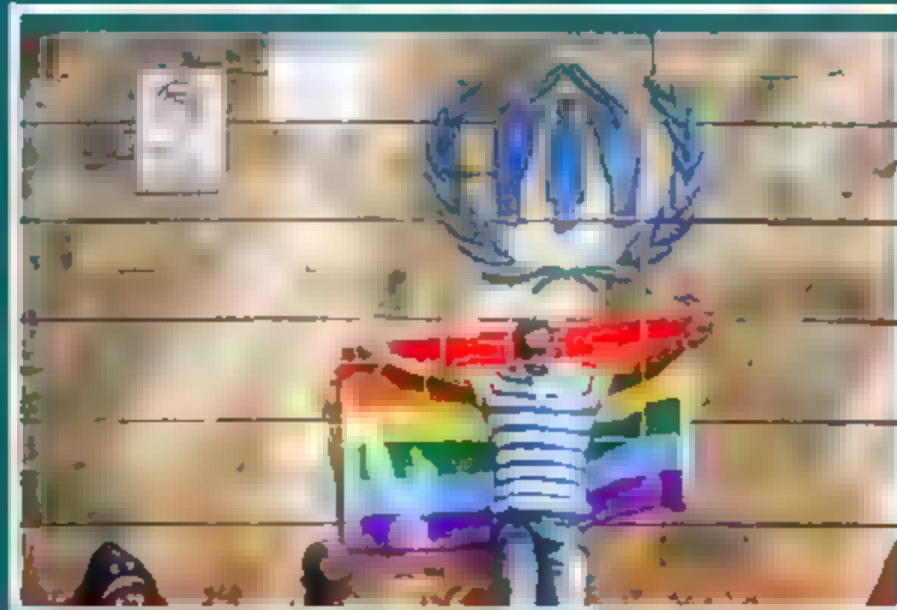
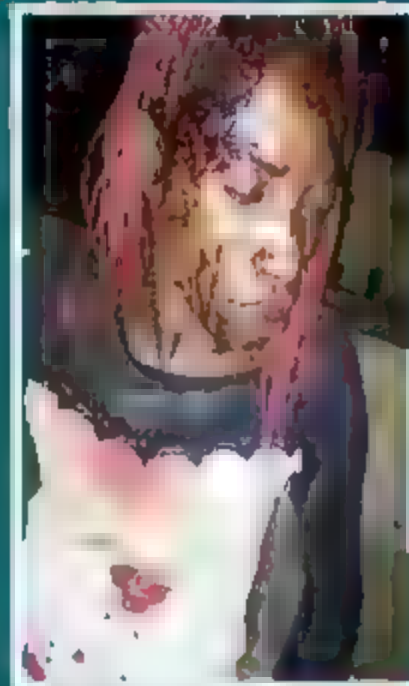


# THE HARSH REALITY OF BEING





# AN LGBTI REFUGEE IN KENYA



\* CREDIT: Refugee Flag Kakuma Facebook Page



...from page 39

away from the registration date.

Ø The Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process (which aims to establish if an applicant meets the refugee definition) takes time and may require several complementary interviews. From 1st July 2014 onwards all decisions need to be authorised by the governmental Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and signed off by the Commissioner for Refugee Affairs. In case the TAC and Commissioner endorse the decision of recognition, the applicant will be issued with a Notification of Recognition.

Ø If and when individuals are granted refugee status and once their Notification of Recognition has been issued, their cases may be referred for resettlement processing.

Ø Resettlement processing again requires a specific resettlement interview with UNHCR staff before the case can be cleared and officially submitted to a resettlement country. The number of resettlement places is limited, while the final decision to accept or deny 2 a case for resettlement remains exclusively with the respective countries, based on their specific legislation and admissibility guidelines. Assistance in the urban areas

### Livelihoods

It should be clear that UNHCR does not normally provide assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in the urban areas. Only a small number of extremely vulnerable refugees can benefit from temporary financial assistance (1 to 3 months), while implementing partners will work with them on an exit strategy. UNHCR does not have the resources to support all LGBTI asylum seekers with continuous assistance during the time they have to remain in Kenya. During the time of processing, individuals can be referred to the implementing partner HIAS for a needs assessment and be provided with initial basic assistance for food and shelter. Asylum seekers and refugees with serious medical problems can be assisted through one of UNHCR's medical partners or public health facilities. Asylum seekers should be made

...access of  
UNHCR and  
legal partners  
to detention  
facilities,  
police stations  
and airport  
is extremely  
limited.

aware of the fact that funds for assistance in the urban areas are extremely limited and need to be equally and fairly distributed among all vulnerable cases. During the initial period, the asylum seekers should identify ways for self-sustenance in the urban areas, in close consultation with HIAS social workers.

### Key Messages:

#### Ø Security:

From March to August 2014, the security situation of all asylum seekers and refugees in the urban areas deteriorated significantly after a directive was issued by the Kenyan government ordering all refugees to relocate to refugee camps. During the Usalama Watch operation numerous reports of widespread arrests, detention, deportations to Somalia, human rights violations, harassment and extortion were received. Many refugees and asylum seekers fell victim to arbitrary arrest and detention while being charged with unlawful presence. Although there is currently no widespread security operation affecting refugees and asylum seekers in the urban areas, the protection context for the urban population remains precarious and unpredictable. A Restrictive Security Laws (Amendment) Bill was signed by the President



at the end of 2014. While on 23 February 2015 the Kenyan High Court nullified the provision with regards to a possible ceiling of 150,000 refugees in Kenya, it maintained the clause regarding the encampment policy of the government. Whilst living in Nairobi asylum seekers may be exposed to arrest, detention, subsequent abuse and even deportation. It should be made clear to new asylum seekers that the access of UNHCR and legal partners to detention facilities, police stations and airport is extremely limited.

*Ø Personal Conduct:*

Regrettably, it is essential for LGBTI persons in Kenya, to act in an inconspicuous and discreet manner for their own security. Homosexual acts are illegal under Kenyan law and Kenyan society is generally not accepting of homosexuality. Harassment of suspected homosexuals by Kenyan 3 authorities is reported to occur regularly. In general Kenyan society's treatment of and attitude toward homosexuals is often characterised by discrimination and stigmatisation. Due to the precarious security situation of asylum seekers and refugees in the urban areas, the huge workload of UNHCR in both Nairobi and Kakuma, as well as long processing time with some of the resettlement countries, it may be expected that a large number of LGBTI individuals may need to remain in Kenya for an extended period of time. It is therefore of utmost

importance that applicants keep a low profile and cooperate with UNHCR and partners as much as possible. During the last months numbers of Ugandan asylum seekers and refugees have camped in front of the UNHCR office in protest against the slow processing as well as the lack of automatic assistance. In some instances they have displayed violent behaviour. This will unfortunately not result in any acceleration of the overall procedures and only causes more delays, while the individuals are exposing themselves to more visibility, protection problems and the risk of police arrest and detention.

*Ø Fraud*

Asylum seekers may have received advice to embellish or exaggerate their claims, however this is a form of fraud which can adversely impact the efficiency and success of RSD and resettlement processes, potentially resulting in rejection or cancellation of refugee status and/or penalties including delayed resettlement processing or closure of resettlement files. During interviews with UNHCR, clients should ensure that they give 100% true statements.

- UNHCR has been informed that unscrupulous brokers are exploiting refugees and asylum seekers in Kampala and Nairobi. These individuals falsely claim that they can provide services related to documentation and resettlement in return for

large amounts of money. In some instances these brokers impersonate UNHCR or partners staff.

- You should not pay any money to any person or organization at any stage of the registration, Refugee Status Determination (RSD) or resettlement process. All services provided by UNHCR, DRA, Immigration Services, IOM and other non-governmental organizations working with refugees in the urban areas and the camps are FREE OF CHARGE.

- Please notify UNHCR of any attempt to charge you for any service related to assistance, documentation, RSD or resettlement related processing or if you would have information about fraudulent exploitation schemes operating in your area:

UNHCR Representative,  
UNHCR Representation in  
Kenya, P.O. Box. 43801-00100  
Nairobi / Lynwood Court  
Building, Waiyaki way Service  
Road (opposite Lions place)  
Fax: +254 (0)204232080;  
E-mail: kennarst@unhcr.org

First published on [www.kuchutimes.com](http://www.kuchutimes.com) in April 2015







## State of LGBTI persons in South Sudan and Refugee LGBTI persons in Uganda 2019

**O**n Friday 27/5/2019 four LGBTI members (2 transgender women), (1 Gay man) and one girl (lesbian) who are members of the South Sudanese LGBTI community were attacked by a group of people with knives and pine wood. They were harassed in the streets of Atlabara C in Juba town; they were beaten up, stabbed, called names and told to stop bringing western culture of homosexuality to South Sudan. The incident happened at 4:00 am on their way back home from a social gathering. The attackers threatened to kill them if they ever report the incident. Due to fear, the violence wasn't reported. This is not the first time such injustices have happened.

The Victims are:

- 1- JB 26
- 2- AH 20
- 3- DM 31
- 4- MD 24

Ganiko is the advocacy officer and the point person for AFA for the Juba Office. On 21st September 2019 a motorcycle rider warned Ganiko that National Security Officials were asking for him in regards to recruiting youth into homosexuality and wanted to

arrest him.

On Sept 22nd 2019, Ganiko fled from South Sudan to Uganda and at the boarder he was transported to Biyale camp in Kiryandongo District. The National Security issued an arrest warrant for him on suspicion of being gay and recruiting youth into what they view as an unnatural act. Due to stigma regarding his sexuality, he left the camp and is currently homeless, jobless and in need of basic support and shelter.

He has been the AFA contact person in Juba in relation to promoting the rights of LGBTI persons. He has been documenting violations and human rights abuses on LGBTI youth in South Sudan (Juba). Since he is foreigner belonging to a marginalized group, he lacks social support and is afraid to be outed which can result into deportation or violence.

Furthermore there are no immediate procedures to cater for the needs of such persons in case of emergencies which call for immediate attention. Uganda is a conservative country where same sex relationships are regarded obscene hence posing danger to a person's life affiliated to this group, living in a foreign country, no job, no social support, no home and has post trauma needs.

The victimized persons are

members of Access For All (AFA) a registered NGO in Uganda.

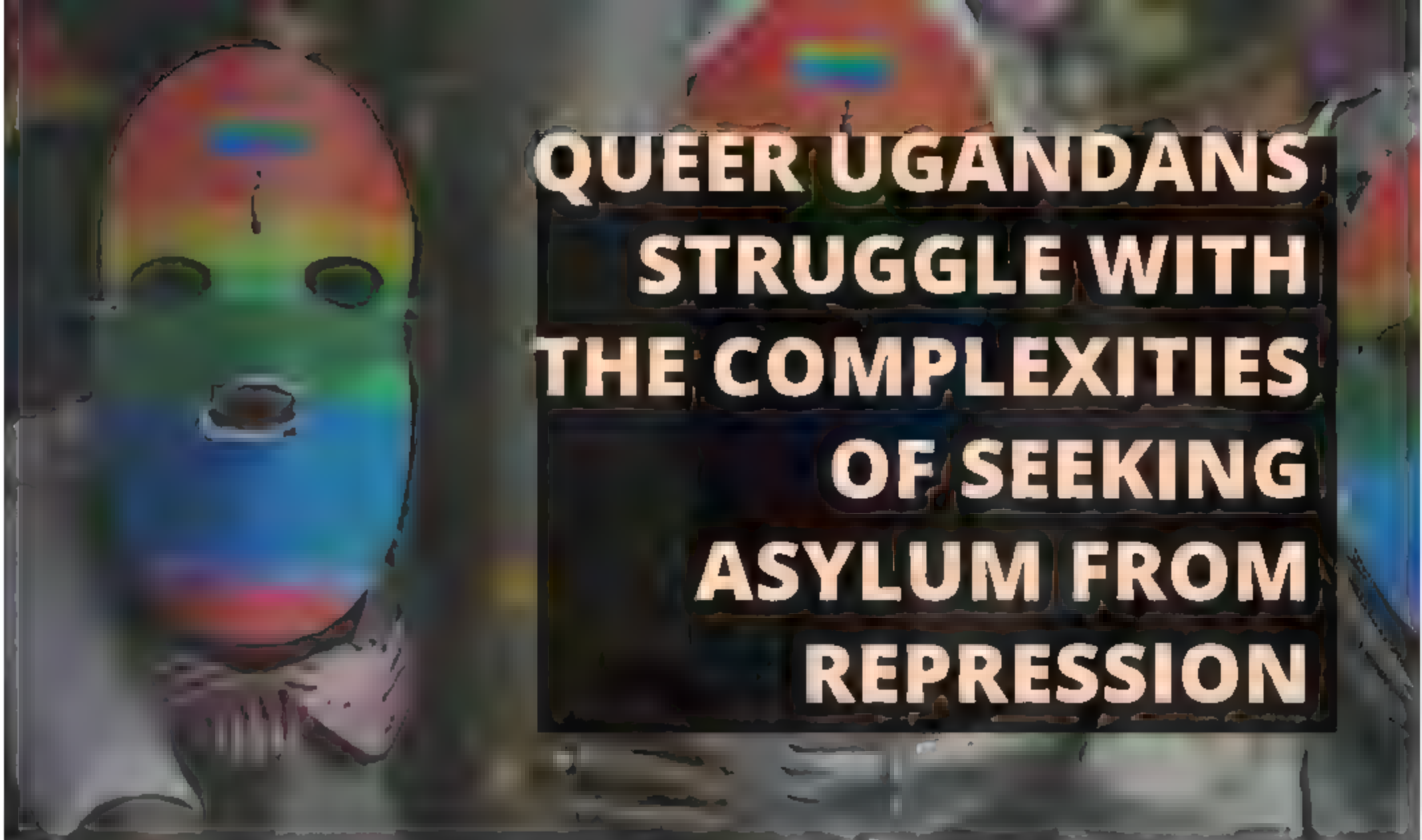
AFA was originally founded in Southern Sudan in February 2016 by Asan Juma. Its main objective is working towards promoting the rights and respect of sexual minorities due to the social injustice, violence and discrimination faced by LGBTI in the region. In the same year, the organization was shut down by the government and the founders and some members sought asylum in Uganda.

When they got to Uganda, they realized that LGBTI refugees faced heightened violence due to unmet multiple and complex social economic and medical needs as well as intersecting oppressions based on race, nationality, sexual orientation and gender identity. This escalated due to the fact that humanitarian actors have no programs serving refugees in the cities and less concern has been taken to cater for LGBTI refugees. Moreover homosexuality is criminalized in Uganda and the laws governing refugees are restrictive.

Hence AFA was reregistered to advocate and contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights of LGBTI refugees in Uganda.

A REPORT BY AFA





# QUEER UGANDANS STRUGGLE WITH THE COMPLEXITIES OF SEEKING ASYLUM FROM REPRESSION

In the eyes of some people, the situation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) people in Kampala has deteriorated.

The first sign of it was when leading local tabloids published the names of suspected gay Ugandans. This put their lives at risk, resulting in some leaving Uganda and seeking asylum elsewhere.

Soon after that scandal, the Anti-Homosexuality Act (2014) was passed, criminalising same-sex relations. The Act included life imprisonment and penalties for individuals, companies, media and other organisations supporting homosexuals.

Although it was later overturned by the courts, the Act created an environment of hate, raising sexual minorities'

fears and insecurities. Thanks to the high political temperatures raised both inside and outside Uganda, it is no coincidence that after the Act was passed in 2014 the number of Ugandans crossing into Kenya increased markedly.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says there are 13-million refugees worldwide, with more than 586 000 in Kenya as of May 2015, and that only 100 000 of them can be resettled annually, a mere 7% to 8%.

According to Eva Camps, a senior UNHCR protection officer based in Nairobi, someone must have misled the Ugandan refugees and asylum-seekers in the city, because they are now demanding immediate financial assistance and the fast-tracking of their resettlement, which they

should know isn't guaranteed.

She reiterates the UNHCR's procedures, which she says the Ugandans have been made aware of time and again. Seeking asylum is a long and tedious journey. The UNHCR is bound by rules and procedures, despite exceptions being made for the earlier arrivals from Uganda.

George Onyore, a legal officer from Hias Kenya, a nonpartisan refugee protection organisation, has the same message. He says, aside from the Ugandans, there are hundreds of other vulnerable urban refugees and asylum seekers. They include unaccompanied minors, those who are terminally ill and older people. He says the resources of the Hias and UNHCR are limited and they have to be used sparingly.

The Hias continually assesses



the needs of all refugees and asylum seekers, and the most needy are assisted. He reiterates there is no blanket assistance for the Ugandans.

Rachel Levitan, the associate vice-president of the Hias global programmes, strategy and planning, has worked on the issue of LGBTI refugees and asylum-seekers for nearly seven years and she also says assistance and relief are not simple processes. She adds that the unexpectedly high refugee flows of the past five years have exacerbated the situation.

Furthermore, in the case of Kenya, security concerns about al-Shabab has delayed the granting of asylum. Besides the urgent need for funds to cushion all at-risk refugees, including LGBTI asylum seekers, Levitan says there's always a need to diffuse the inevitable tensions that arise between refugees and asylum-seekers and host communities.

Eric Gitari, the executive director of the Kenyan National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, says the Ugandans' situation is dire but, unless they fully understand the predicament they are in, it won't be easy to assist them out. Whatever the UNHCR's shortcomings, he says, the Ugandans have to work closely with whoever is trying to help them.

He says the Kenyan LGBTI movement plays a double role as both a partner to the UNHCR and a support to the

Ugandans. Sometimes they advocate for the Ugandans and press their case with the UNHCR, and sometimes they are on the side of UNHCR, supporting its position on the Ugandans.

Although it is tempting to see the asylum-seekers as being impatient and entitled, their predicament has real structural roots. A report by Yiftach Millo, titled *Invisible in the City: Protection Gaps Facing Sexual Minority Refugees and Asylum-seekers in Urban Ecuador, Ghana, Israel and Kenya*, says the needs of LGBTI asylum-seekers are often invisible because it is near impossible for them to

*The needs of LGBTI asylum-seekers are often invisible because it is near impossible for them to quantify the urgency of their need.*

quantify the urgency of their need.

The report says: "Although the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has made significant strides in its headquarters and in some country operations to protect sexual minority refugees, protection in the field remains extremely limited. Their protection is affected by a general misconception of lack of need and urgency resulting from the 'invisibility' of their plight."

Adrian Jjuuko, the executive director of the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Foundation, the leading LGBTI litigation organisation in Uganda, says the majority of Ugandan LGBTI asylum-seekers and refugees find it hard to quantify and qualify what is considered persecution. This is because persecution is a deeply personal experience and sometimes what passes as persecution for an individual might not hold up when it is subjected to legal rigours.

This has led many escapees to forge documents, including warrants of arrest, which, when referred to his organisation for verification, are often found to be fake. This doesn't mean they were not being persecuted, only that the true nature of their persecution might not be electrifying and so they seek alternative narratives.

Some Ugandan LGBTI refugees and asylum-seekers feel comfortable telling their secrets to "Mama" Stella



Nyanzi of the Makerere University's Makerere Institute of Social Research.

She says things are tough, especially for transgender women. For example, it is impossible for them to go to a market in Kenya to buy a skirt because there is nowhere for them to try it on. So they do it when they sneak back into Uganda because they know their way around.

Similarly, they will sneak back to Uganda to try to find work because making a living in Kenya is harder for them than in Kampala, or because the only food they can afford in Kenya is terrible. Sometimes, she says, having that skirt is necessary for dignity. These are the details that get overlooked and which bureaucracies cannot "see".

Nevertheless, many Ugandans remain holed up in the slums of Nairobi, where they live illegally. But the Kenyan government recently ordered all urban refugees to move to refugee camps because it suspects Somali refugees are harbouring members of al-Shabab.

The UNHCR says this is creating a precarious situation. More than 52 000 refugees and asylum-seekers reside in Nairobi.

On the morning of April 19 2015, the world woke up to news of the death at sea of more than 700 Africans whose vessel had capsized off the Libyan coast. They were on their way to Europe. On Twitter, a user asked: "How do you face the Mediterranean and still decide to forge ahead?" #Africa was his hashtag of choice.

One might ask the same of the Ugandans. Why do they live in deplorable conditions in refugee camps, knowing resettlement isn't guaranteed, or that it might take up to three years? Why do they squeeze into cubicles in Nairobi slums, hoping for survival money when it is not guaranteed?

In the case of Uganda, the answers are complex. Although many people will tolerate LGBTI people, they will not let them live as they would like to. It is obvious that those LGBTI people in Kampala I saw dancing and partying on my first night there were able to do so because they are rich and protected, or have mastered a way to manoeuvre their way within the homophobic

society. On the other hand, the ones who flee have often been traumatised, or because, as Nyanzi says, they can't hold up their heads.

Those who can afford to stay may not fully understand that, for some, leaving feels like a matter of life and death. At the same time, those who leave may not understand why their fellow community members choose to stay.

In the middle of all this, the UNHCR, nongovernmental organisations and the complex system designed to facilitate asylum are clearly struggling to understand that many things can be true at the same time — that you might be tolerated at home but, if it also forces you to negotiate your full humanity, then you would rather live in limbo, in a camp somewhere, holding out for what might be possible.

This is an edited extract from Isaac Otidi Amuke's essay Facing the Mediterranean in *As You Like It*, Volume II of the Gerald Kraak Anthology, *African Perspectives on Gender, Social Justice and Sexuality* (Jacana). Amuke is a prizewinning journalist in Nairobi, Kenya

EDITOR'S NOTE: As carried by Mail & Guardian in June 2018





# MY ATTACKERS PROMISED TO KILL EVERY GAY PERSON



**M**y name is Nyobaho, a gay refugee from Burundi living at Angels Refugee Support Group in Uganda. By the time I came here, I already had problems which have obviously followed me to where I live now.

I was beaten one day while on my way from work to my place in Kasenyi.

About 3 weeks after this incident, 3 men came to my home and beat me severely; before they fled, they wrote on the walls in my house with wordings that they didn't want me living there or in the neighbourhood. That's when I decided to shift to a more secure place.

That night, I went to the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) where I shared my predicament. They promised to help me the next day since it was already night and there was barely anything they could do. I was taken to Nakivala camp where I stayed for 6 months before I was attacked again. After this attack, I fled to Kampala

I lived in Kampala until I heard that UNHCR was doing verification for all refugees at the settlement so I had to go back. On arrival, I saw the people who had attacked me the last time; I got scared and ran back to Kampala. I had run out of money so I sold my phone to raise the transport fare to get me back to Kampala. That is how I remained unverifid for two years. Eventually, I underwent the verification exercise and officially gained refugee status.

Recently, I was attacked again and that's when I decided to leave and come to Angels Refugee Camp where I have been living for about a month.





On 20th October 2019 at 6:00am, I received a call from an unknown number. The person was in my neighbourhood and said he was client who needed me to dread his hair. I asked him to wait till 10:00 am as it was still too early.

He agreed to go and come back but requested that I go outside and talk to him so that we could negotiate the price. I went out to meet him but kept on phone since I did not know what he looked like. He however told me he would recognize me when he saw me.

In a few minutes, he confirmed that he had seen me and got off the phone. Two men walked up to me; one went passed and grabbed me by the neck. When the second man started to beat me, others came out of hiding and joined them. I don't remember the exact number but they could have been more than 5. They beat me till I lost consciousness. I remember while they bashed me, they said in vernacular "Tetwagala abasiyazi wano!" ( translated that they don't accept gay people here in Kampala). I didn't hear much of the rest. By the time I regained consciousness, I was at Mulago hospital. I am still on medication but barely have a balanced diet to go with it since I lost so much blood.

## NARRATION FROM A WITNESS.

We were inside the house when we heard a man screaming "Help me! Help me!" while we heard others shouting, "We don't like you and we will kill you all!" When we ran out, I saw a crowd had surrounded him. When they saw other people come out, the attackers ran away. We heard them say that they knew there were other gay people living inside our house and they will come for us too. The doctors said that he had been assaulted with injuries all over his body including his head. They did a CT scan to find out if there was any internal bleeding in the skull but luckily, he was beaten more around the eye, nose and mouth area. He still nose bleeds and experiences so much pain around the groin area.

On the day he was beaten, we carried him to Old Kampala Police station where we reported the matter. We were given a referral number. They told us to take him to the hospital for medical attention and a report. The following Friday, he went with a legal officer (Philip) from Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) who did an assessment at Old Kampala Police.

Most of the attacks have taken place right in front of our main gate. We need an emergency intervention to leave this place and relocate for our safety. We are 12 people living here and the whole neighborhood is aware that we are LGBT+ refugees, both urban refugees and those from Nakivale settlement.

We don't have any kind of support. We only depend on help and handouts from visitors and well wishers. We also need to be advocated for as LGBT+ refugees living in Uganda. Most of us fled our home countries because of persecution, discrimination and the torture only to find the same in a place we came to seek refuge. We experience double stigma as refugees and also as LGBT+ persons. We can't get jobs. We are not allowed to move freely because it is unsafe. We don't have rights here. We don't have life. ■





**KUCHU TIMES**

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